LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI The Demise of Historical Man

1991

Partisan Review 3

$5.00

WILLIAM PHILLIPS New Histories
EDITH KURZWEIL Once More Berlin
FRANCOIS FURET The Future of the Left
WALTER LAQUEUR Intellectuals and the Future of Communism
SHLOMO AVINERI Reflections on Eastern Europe
PETER LOEWENBERG The Uses of Anxiety
DAPHNE MERKIN The Talking Cure Blues
VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV Stalin's Death
DONALD DAVIE Three Pastors in Berlin
MORRIS DICKSTEIN The Pursuit for the Ordinary
GITTA HONEGGER Thomas Bernhard
FEIWEL KUPFERBERG The Other Postmodernism
RICHARD KOSTELANETZ Authenticity in Documentary
JEFFREY DONALDSON Geoffrey Hill
HEARNE PARDEE Charles Tomlinson

James Dickey
Fiction

Pearl K. Bell
Fiction Chronicle

Karen Wilkin
At the Galleries

REVIEWS:

George Bradley
Michael Collier
Peter Filkins
Rachel Hadas
Pico Iyer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art in the 80's.
What all the heat was about.

GALLERY GOING

FOUR SEASONS IN THE ART WORLD

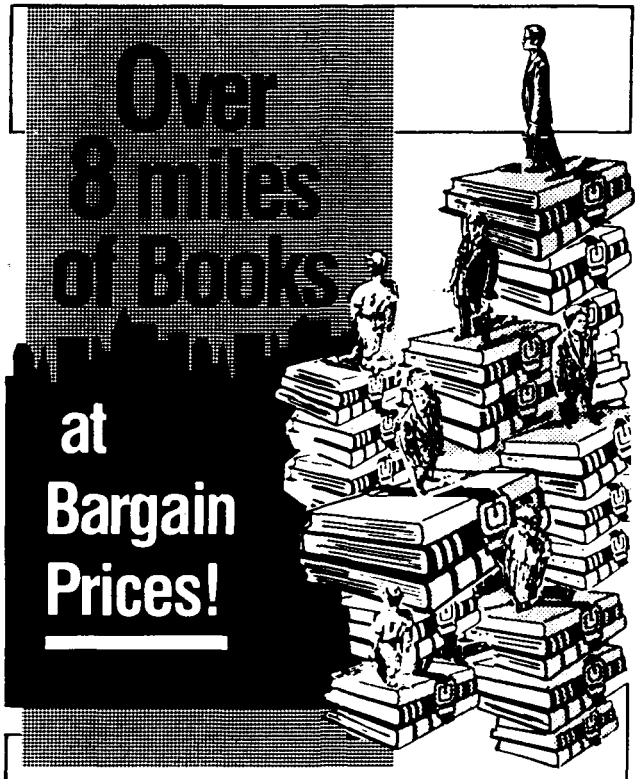
BY JED PERL

"Jed Perl is the most important art critic of his generation."
—Hilton Kramer

Lou Salvatori

HBJ
HARCOURT • BRACE • JOVANOVICH
Available at bookstores everywhere.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Over 2 million current, rare and out-of-print books at bargain prices!

Write for our latest
"STRAND SPECIALS" Catalogue

Tens of thousands of new reviewer's copies of recently published books at

50% OFF PUBLISHER'S LIST PRICE

the
STRAND

NEW YORK'S LARGEST USED BOOK STORE

828 BROADWAY • 12th St., NYC, NY 10003
(212) 473-1452 • Mon-Fri: 9:30-9:30
Sat: 9:30-6:30 Sun: 11-6

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT
159 JOHN ST. (corner FRONT ST.)
Open: 10-9/Mon. thru Sun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Partisan Review

EDITOR
William Phillips

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Edith Kurzweil

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Steven Marcus

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
Estelle Leontief
Don Share
Jane Uscilka

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Lionel Abel
Stanislaw Baranczak
Morris Dickstein
Rachel Hadas
David Lehman
Mark Lilla
Daphne Merkin
Rosanna Warren

CONSULTANTS
John Ashbery
Richard Gilman
Frank Kermode
Barbara Rose
Stephen Spender

PUBLICATIONS AND ADVISORY BOARD
Joanna S. Rose, Chairman
Lillian Braude
Carter Burden
Edwin Cohen
Cynthia G. Colin
H. William Fitelson*
Richard Grimm
Gerald J. Gross
Marjorie Iseman
Harry Kahn
Mary Kaplan
Shirley Johnson Lans
Vera List
Robert H. Montgomery, Jr.
Lynn Nesbit
David B. Pearce, M.D.
Joan C. Schwartz
Anne W. Simon
Roger L. Stevens
Robert Wechsler

*retired

CORRESPONDING EDITORS
Leslie Epstein, Eugene Goodheart, Donald Marshall, Leonard Michaels, Roger Shattuck, Mark Shechner

PARTISAN REVIEW, published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall by Partisan Review, Inc., is at Boston University, 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215. (617) 353-4260. Subscriptions $18.00 a year, $33.00 for two years, $47.00 for three years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $21.00 a year, $36.00 for two years; institutions, $28.00 for one year. All payments from foreign countries must be made U.S. money order or checks payable in U.S. currency. Prepaid single issue $5.00, anniversary issue $8.00. Add $1.00 per issue for postage and handling. US ISSN 0031-2525.
Copyright © 1991 by Partisan Review, Inc. Second class postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts and additional entries. Postmaster: Send address changes to 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215.
Distributed in the U.S.A. by DeBoer, Nutley, NJ 07710, Capitol News, Boston 02120. Ingram Periodicals, Nashville 37217. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.
Send manuscripts (originals or clear photocopies only) to 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215. No manuscripts will be returned nor queries answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PR/3 1991 VOLUME LVIII NUMBER 3

Contents

CONTRIBUTORS

COMMENT

William Phillips **425**

Edith Kurzweil **428**

POLITICS AFTER COMMUNISM

François Furet *The Future of the Left* **432**

Walter Laqueur *Intellectuals and the Failure of Communism* **437**

Shlomo Avineri *Reflections on Eastern Europe* **442**

ARTICLES

Leszek Kolakowski *The Demise of Historical Man* **461**

Vladimir Solovyov *Stalin's Death* **471**

Pearl K. Bell *Fiction Chronicle* **478**

Gitta Honegger *Thomas Bernhard* **493**

Morris Dickstein *The Pursuit for the Ordinary* **506**

Peter Loewenberg *The Uses of Anxiety* **514**

Daphne Merkin *The Talking Cure Blues* **526**

Karen Wilkin *At the Galleries* **533**

Feiwel Kupferberg *The Other Postmodernism* **541**

Richard Kostelanetz *Authenticity in "Documentary"* **545**

FICTION

James Dickey *The Promised Fire* **449**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STATE OF POETRY

Jeffrey Donaldson	*Must Men Stand By What They Write?*	**548**
Hearne Pardee	*A Distant Vision: Charles Tomlinson and American Art*	**554**
George Bradley	*Lush and Lean*	**562**
Michael Collier	*Poetic Voices*	**565**
Peter Filkins	*Uttering the Unutterable*	**569**
Donald Davie	*Three Pastors in Berlin*	**574**

BOOKS

Rachel Hadas	*Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco *The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick	**579**
Pico Iyer	*The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro	**585**

Editor's Note: We regret the misspelling of John Guillory's name and the incorrect attribution of Roland Barthes's *Death of the Author* in our last issue (PR/2, 1991, p. 387).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These are some of the people... Lionel Abel, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, John Ashbery, W. H. Auden, James Baldwin, Donald Barthelme, Roland Barthes, Samuel Beckett, Daniel Bell, Saul Bellow, Peter Berger, Isaiah Berlin, Joseph Brodsky, Peter Brooks, Robert Brustein, Albert Camus, Cyril Connolly, Morris Dickstein, T. S. Eliot, Herbert Ferber, Michel Foucault, Helen Frankenthaler, William Gass, Allen Ginsberg, Nathan Glazer, Eugene Goodheart, Clement Greenberg, Peter Handke, Elizabeth Hardwick, John Hollander, Sidney Hook, Richard Howard, Irving Howe, Franz Kafka, Frank Kermode, Arthur Koestler, Leszek Kolakowski, Irving Kristol, Milan Kundera, Edith Kurzweil, Doris Lessing, Mario Vargas Llosa, Robert Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, André Malraux, Steven Marcus, Mary McCarthy, Daphne Merkin, James Merrill, Leonard Michaels, Hans Morgenthau, Robert Motherwell, Vladimir Nabokov, Joyce Carol Oates, George Orwell, Amos Oz, Cynthia Ozick, Octavio Paz, William Phillips, Marge Piercy, Norman Podhoretz, Barbara Rose, Harold Rosenberg, Philip Roth, Jean-Paul Sartre, Meyer Schapiro, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Roger Shattuck, Ignazio Silone, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Andrei Siniavski, Susan Sontag, Stephen Spender, William Stafford, William Styron, Lester Thurow, Michel Tournier, Diana Trilling, Lionel Trilling, Robert Penn Warren, Leon Wieseltier

who have written for

Partisan Review

Why don't you become one of our readers?

PARTISAN REVIEW
236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215

☐ Enter my subscription
☐ Extend my subscription

☐ One year at $18.00
☐ Two years at $33.00

☐ Three years at $47.00
☐ Institutional rate per year $28.00

☐ Please bill me
☐ My check is enclosed

☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA

card # expiration date

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTRIBUTORS

EDITH KURZWEIL's new book on feminists and Freudians will be published by Westview Press. . . . **FRANÇOIS FURET** is an historian at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. . . . Chairman of the International Research Council at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, **WALTER LAQUEUR** is the author most recently of *The Long Road to Freedom: Russia and Glasnost* (MacMillan). . . . Professor of Political Science at Hebrew University, **SHLOMO AVINERI** was a member of an international observation team in the recent Hungarian and Czechoslovakian elections. . . . **JAMES DICKEY**'s new novel, *To the White Sea*, will be published by Houghton Mifflin. . . . **LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI**'s latest book is *Modernity on Endless Trial* (U. of Chicago). . . . **VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV** is the author of *Behind the High Kremlin Walls* (Dodd Mead). . . . **PEARL K. BELL** is a writer and critic who lives in Cambridge, MA. . . . **GITTA HONEGGER**, a director at the Yale Repertory Theatre, teaches at the Yale School of Drama. . . . Oxford University Press will publish **MORRIS DICKSTEIN**'s new book, *The Critic and Society. From Matthew Arnold to the New Historicism*. . . . Professor of European History at UCLA, **PETER LOEWENBERG** is the author of *Decoding the Past* (Knopf). . . . **DAPHNE MERKIN**'s first novel, *Enchantment*, was brought out by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; her collected essays will be published by Poseidon Press. . . . **KAREN WILKIN**'s monograph on Kenneth Noland is available from Poligrafa. . . . **FEIWEL KUPFERBERG** is Associate Professor at Aalborg University in Denmark. . . . **RICHARD KOSTELANETZ**'s latest book is *The New Poetics and Some Old* (Southern Illinois U. Press). . . . **JEFFREY DONALDSON** teaches modern poetry at McMaster University in Ontario. . . . University of Chicago Press has just brought out *Collected Poems* by **DONALD DAVIE**, Emeritus Professor of the Humanities at Vanderbilt University. . . . **HEARNE PARDEE** is a painter and critic living in New York City. . . . **GEORGE BRADLEY**'s second book of poems, *Of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, appeared this spring (Knopf). . . . **MICHAEL COLLIER** teaches at the University of Maryland; his second collection of poems is *The Folded Heart* (Wesleyan U. Press). . . . **PETER FILKINS** teaches at Simon's Rock of Bard College. . . . Faber and Faber will bring out **RACHEL HADAS**'s new book, *Unending Dialogue: Voices from an AIDS Poetry Workshop*. . . . *The Lady and the Monk. Four Seasons in Kyoto* by **PICO IYER** will appear this fall (Knopf).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMMENT

The Old and the New Historicism The persistence of Marxism in the academy – even a diluted or revisionist Marxism – is a constant source of astonishment. And though there are explanations, it remains something of a mystery. To anyone who rejected Marxism as a philosophy and political theory as well as a social program as far back as the thirties, the championing of Marxism by successive generations of academics defies the laws of reason. One would think there had been no Moscow Trials, no Gulag, no police state, no KGB persecution, no *perestroika*, no *glasnost*, no rejection of Marxism in Central Europe, and in Russia itself. Nothing has happened. History stopped in 1917.

These observations are occasioned by reading Stephen Greenblatt's new book, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (Routledge Chapman & Hall), a collection of essays about Elizabethan and Renaissance subjects and several pieces about the theory with which he is associated, the new historicism. Greenblatt is an industrious and fairly learned scholar, though he is not a critic, as he claims. And the new historicism has gained some popularity, though not wild acclaim, in scholarly English department circles.

Since I am not an expert in Greenblatt's field, I will leave the scrutiny of his observations in this area to other specialists, except to note that his piece on *The Jew of Malta* seems farfetched. Greenblatt labors a parallel between Marlowe's play and Marx's essay on the Jewish question, in which he argues that Marx's definition of the Jew as the representative figure of capitalism is similar to Marlowe's depiction of Barnabas.

But in the more discursive essays, Greenblatt displays a general belief in a kind of not entirely orthodox form of Marxism. I should preface my discussion of his political views, however, with the qualification that I am not sure I understand exactly what Greenblatt is saying, for his writing is quite ponderous and abstract. Indeed, I have the impression that Greenblatt often is carefully avoiding precision of meaning.

On the whole, Greenblatt relates to Marxism as though it were the point of reference, the authoritative theory, for all further speculation. To this he adds "an openness to the theoretical ferment of the last few years" and a dash of Foucault, mainly in his placing of power as a central force in the modern world and in his method of free-associating numerous details – some seemingly irrelevant – to the main historical forces.

Thus, in a discussion of the relation of art to society – though Greenblatt uses fancier terms and categories – he argues for steering a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

course between Jameson, who is treated as a central, authoritative figure, and Lyotard, who is given equal rating. Apparently, Greenblatt believes that art both reflects basic economic and social conditions and to some extent takes on a life of its own. The formulation is not startlingly original or illuminating. Elsewhere, in pursuing the same question, Greenblatt says works of art are characterized by wonder and resonance. Wonder seems to be a synonym for wonderful, magical, beautiful, overwhelming; resonance a synonym for social context, for meanings that relate art to nonesthetic factors. This is another high-flown formulation for obvious aspects of art. But, in addition, it is another academic version of the power and lasting nature of art. It is a totally static view of the origin and influence of works of art.

Greenblatt also has a lengthy disquisition on the differences between the new historicism and the old one. He says the new historicism is distinguished by the idea that man can influence history; that it makes value judgments; and that it does not "venerate the past." This distinction is not only invalid; it simply restates old Marxist clichés.

The essays also contain a number of left political reflexes. For example, there are several jibes at Reagan as an imperialist, a warmonger, a cold warrior, and some knee-jerk remarks about the evils of conservatism. Generally, it must be said, Greenblatt's politics are not very sophisticated, and they tend toward the politically correct.

This is not necessarily to disparage Stephen Greenblatt's scholarly achievements in an area, in which, as I said, I am not an expert, but to call attention to the pervasive influence of Marxism in the academy, despite its demise in those countries where Marxism had been the official doctrine for so many years.

Hitchens's Trotskyists Christopher Hitchens is not only a slick journalist but also a slick thinker. He should be a valuable contributor to the popular magazines, but, unfortunately, *The New York Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and *The London Review of Books* utilize his talents. He is also a regular columnist for *The Nation*, where he lends a spark to the old-fashioned radicalism that persists after it has been pronounced dead.

Fortunately for Hitchens, he has a fund of doctrines that he can draw on from the politically correct arena. One of his recent efforts appears in *The London Review of Books*, where he ostensibly reviews yet another in the long line of books about the New York intellectuals – this one titled *Critical Crossings* by Neil Jumonville (University of California Press). This latest account is not as ideological as most of its predecessors. But it assigns different roles to the main actors, inflating some, diminishing others, thus creating a somewhat skewed picture of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

period and its spokesmen.

But Hitchens uses the book to push his own peculiar line. He designates Trotsky as the central symbolic figure, and makes it appear as if most of the New York intellectuals were defined by their relation to the "old man," the revolutionary leader and then the leading critic of Stalin and his regime. Thus the curve of Trotsky's life is made out to be the paradigm for the lives and careers of the New York intellectuals.

This picture, however, is not only misleading, but it follows the pattern of the Stalinist diatribes against the anti-Stalinists by labeling them Trotskyists. Of course, in the Stalinist arsenal, Trotskyist meant reactionary and imperialist. In Hitchens's arsenal, the invented Trotskyists turn out to be mostly Jews. Maybe this is not intentional, but it is strangely suggestive.

Among his other ideological innuendos, Hitchens pictures Lionel Trilling as a Trotskyist who later masqueraded as a "gentleman-liberal." He also curiously defines the problem of the intellectual in politics as one of elites. "Should the masses or the intellectuals," asks Hitchens, "be the proper target of enlightenment?" Apparently, the whole complex history of intellectual responsibility and engagement boils down to this.

In addition, Hitchens distorts the Ledeen episode, making it appear as though *Partisan Review* sold out the entire liberal heritage of the West by considering a piece by Michael Ledeen. Hitchens falsely describes the piece, in which Michael Ledeen discussed the process of arriving at foreign policies, as an attack on democracy. And he further tells a politically accusatory story about the magazine, fed him, he says, by Norman Birnbaum. According to this version, we postponed our fiftieth anniversary in order to conceal our past – a past, by the way, I've written about several times and went into fully in my memoir, *A Partisan View* (1983).

Finally, the piece is spiced with politically correct observations: such as the characterization of the "Judenrat" as being "at the service of the empire"; a bow in the direction of the Palestinians; a few cracks against those who supported the Gulf War, as well as a hint of Israeli interests in the war; and an often-repeated remark about the "scale of Iraqi civilian . . . casualties."

The rest of the piece is harmless but pointless.

W. P.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once More Berlin On May 9th, a two-hour panel discussion on prime-time television in Berlin – featuring the elected representatives of syndicates and industrialists, a pastor, a lawyer, a sociologist, and a psychoanalyst – focused on how to handle the antagonisms and upsets caused by the sudden reunification of Germans. They concluded that, in first line, they would have to deal with the psychological hurts – both real and perceived – of the citizens on both sides of the former divide. The week before, the political psychologists who convene in Frankfurt every year had invited Hans-Joachim Maaz, the author of a bestseller, *Der Gefühlsstau – Jammed Emotions* or *Stalled Feelings*, subtitled *A Psychogram of the DDR*. He is a psychiatrist practicing psychotherapy in Halle – formerly "in the East." They wanted him to elaborate further about the condition he had described. The participants at the yearly meetings of the German Psychoanalytic Association also focused on understanding those whom they used to call "our brothers in the East."

Why and how have national issues so quickly become psychologized, I kept asking myself. And why does it seem easier or more useful to perceive the mutual antipathies that followed on the heels of euphoria as deep vexation, as mortification, rather than as opposition in the former West (by so-called "Wessies") to paying higher taxes, to absorbing a large work force, to losing what had become a more or less predictable political equilibrium; and in the former East (by so-called "Ossies") as resentment that the glories of capitalism and consumerism are accompanied by competition, unemployment, and insecurity.

On the surface, Berlin seems to be united: although a few U-Bahn and S-Bahn stations, for instance, on the Potsdammer Platz, still remain closed, public transportation is city-wide (enviably cleaner and safer than in New York). Not only is the wall down, but one has to ask where the "death strip" – which formerly was manned by armed Russian soldiers on watchtowers – used to be. Here, new roads and apartment houses (they contrast sharply with the staid but dilapidated prewar "bourgeois houses" in the area) are being built. However, pieces of the wall, encased in kitschy plastic boxes, are sold by Turkish, Polish, and Slavic sidewalk vendors. Their favorite spot appears to be the Brandenburger Tor – at one end of Unter den Linden and a few steps from the Reichstag. In this honky-tonk, bazaar-like atmosphere, tourists can choose from thousands of Communist insignias, decorations, medals, army hats, belts, coats – all of them shabby and overpriced. This type of internationalization of Berlin clearly was unintended and is not featured in the special edition of the colorful, informative pamphlet presented to foreign visitors. The by now mythical Alexanderplatz – whose massive television tower dominates the glitzy Soviet version of Potemkin's villages – does impress, although

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the food in the nearby restaurants, when available, is abominable and expensive.

The Wessies on the political right, smelling the profits that could be made by bringing their know-how to the East and cheap labor to the West, were delighted at the prospect of reunification. But whether or not they were carried away by the promise of liberating their fellow Germans, or realized that Chancellor Kohl and his party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), would gain politically, they soon were disenchanted: the Ossies' infrastructures are as good as nonexistent; their factories are antiquated. They were used to being taken care of by a paternalistic state, to getting paid whether or not they produced, and their standard of living is somewhat below that of the Wessies' unemployed. Although industrialists, lawyers, and financial manipulators quickly made large deals and potential profits, taking advantage of the low prices of real estate and of the Ossies' inordinate inexperience with market forces, they no longer want to invest without governmental backing or guarantees.

The Wessies on the political left, however, who used to romanticize socialist ideas, not only resented the fact that reunification seemed to strengthen their political opponents on the right, but were unprepared for the ideological vacuum. Some of them had fled from the Eastern sector between 1945 and 1961, and now are able to claim property – a dilemma for critics of capitalism and for humanitarians, who by retaking their houses and farms must get rid of the current occupants who cannot possibly find other accommodations (at ridiculously low rents, and in a housing shortage). Others, full of curiosity upon visiting the former East, noted that the disregard for the ecology they had laid at the door of capitalism had been infinitely worse under socialism. And yet others, such as Günther Grass, who had tried to forge a German "middle ground" by eschewing the totalitarian aspects of socialism and equating it to the mindlessness and greed of consumerism, advised that unification should wait.

But how could postponement have facilitated the merger, particularly since the borders came down so suddenly, and the entire world reverberated under the demonstrations for freedom? In any event, when the Ossies insisted on "Deutschmark hier, oder wir kommen zu dir," the game was up. Neither right nor left could ignore this threat any more than they could ignore the stench of the Trabi's nearly unrefined gasoline.

According to Maaz, the Wessies have managed to build a democratic society over the last forty-five years, while the Ossies moved from fascism to Stalinism to "Western" consumerism without missing a beat. "The constant promise of a better future (communism) and the magic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

banishment of a foreign past (Stalinism)," he argues, "are the two faces of the illusion . . . Our misery, need, guilt and powerlessness are not real, because everything is either going to get better or will be left behind us. By denouncing a few Stalinists now (a few Nazis in the '40s and '50s), we're home free." That is why the psychoanalysts and psychologists maintain that "the Nazi is still within us." They debate whether he is only within the Ossies' psyche, and whether the Wessies, in view of their unbrotherly and profiteering behavior toward the Ossies, are similarly afflicted. Given the credibility of psychoanalytic notions in the former West, and the wish by the profession to "heal" the former East, it should not surprise us that the media accepts psychological categories to explain political ones.

On May 15th, *The International Herald Tribune* reported, that "The New Hitler Youth are Troubling Germany": leftist squatters had been physically attacked and slandered by rightist skinheads, and anti-Semitic graffiti and posters had appeared overnight. Some explain the mix of Nazi slogans and street crime in terms of bias against Poles, Turks, and other former "Easterners" who, it is said, by invading Berlin in droves, "take away jobs, drive up rents, and encourage speculation." Others claim that these biases were there but had not been allowed to surface under the previously repressive regime. "None of this would have happened if we had taken a few years to educate the Ossies before unification," argues the left. "The government has to be moved to Berlin, and has to invest, and industry has to train the Ossie work force," argues the right. They did manage to agree, at least on the television program, that ruffled feelings and deep vexations have to be aired; that Wessies have to stop acting superior to Ossies who, contrary to the lore, *did* work – though ineffectively and unprofitably – and who have to make *all* the adjustments and adaptations which the Wessies will have to pay for through heavy taxation.

In the midst of these upheavals, Germans had to respond to the Gulf War. Aside from the comparisons of Saddam Hussein to Hitler, which inevitably triggered conscious and unconscious memories along with realistic fears, and the practical considerations favoring nonparticipation, the right was afraid to support America and the United Nations forces lest it be deemed fascist, although Chancellor Kohl reluctantly backed the war. By then, Iraqi Scuds were coming down on Israeli civilians, and the world was wondering if, once again, the Jews would be gassed.

The left, however, was caught in its ideology: after years of sponsoring peace movements and actively fighting so-called imperialism around the world, leftists felt honor-bound to condemn the war. So, after the beginning of the hostilities, they organized massive demonstra-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions, especially against America and Israel. Blind pacifism reigned, and the extreme factions of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens went so far as to advocate denying Israel weapons for self-defense. Yet, a few courageous leftists publicly supported this war. Wolf Bierman, for instance, asked ironically whether one should let a Hitler stay in power just to keep peace and whether it was progress, forty-five years after Auschwitz, to have Jews sit in their little gas chambers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, with German gas masks over their noses, awaiting the moment when the poisonous gas would seep in. Hans Magnus Enzensberger depicted Saddam Hussein as the same type of enemy of mankind as Hitler, as yet another dictator for whom lives are meaningless and who knows no limits or rules. Wolfram Schütte asked whether Germans had not anticipated this war because they had been drunk on peace and called upon his countrymen to stop their habit of "irrationally fundamentalizing rationalism." And some German historians signed a declaration of solidarity with Israel. But they were a tiny, and brave, minority.

In the meantime, entrepreneurs kept maneuvering in order to eventually make profits (and profiteer?) in the "Eastern markets." Ossies kept losing jobs as their antiquated plants closed down. Wessies kept debating the pros and cons of making Berlin the capital of the new, united Germany, and the handful of German Jews, whose close friends, of course, had belonged to the left, now felt ostracized and betrayed – to the point of considering emigration. For philo-Semitism had turned into anti-Semitism.

No wonder, I concluded as I boarded my plane for Paris, that Germans, who traditionally are addicted to order and predictability, in this quagmire of politics, in this topsy-turvy and uncontrollable situation, seek solutions in their psychology – the only domain where ambiguity and ambivalence are considered normal even when close to intolerable. With all these daunting and unresolvable problems, what else could the Germans do but psychologize them?

E. K.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POLITICS AFTER COMMUNISM

FRANÇOIS FURET

The Future of the Left

What remains of the socialist idea now that the communist societies are collapsing? This is the question that will dominate historical reflection upon the actions of the European left in the years to come. Indeed it is an issue that should also concern the right since, in losing its enemy, the right has lost not only its distinctive identity but the essence of what gave its intellectual position in the twentieth century its most compelling force; now it is in danger of having to argue its case in terms of mere material interests. Still, it is the left that is directly stricken and battered by the bankruptcy of communism. And however distorted, confiscated, and caricatured these may already have been, its history, traditions, and ideas are at stake.

It is possible of course to argue that from the outset, the socialist and communist traditions went their separate ways, and to simply write off the October Revolution as a perversion of the socialist idea. There are political advantages in this sort of *post facto* prophylaxis, but these must be balanced against some rather steep intellectual costs; for we are being asked not merely to forget but to bury and to deny all that has linked the Russian Revolution to the European left, including the non-communist elements of it. How much there is to forget, even if we limit ourselves to France! From the "Soviets Everywhere" proclaimed on the banners of the Popular Front parades in 1936 to the pro-Soviet enthusiasm of the Liberation, and from the so-called Peace Movement of the Cold War to the vogue of Fidel Castro and his movement, the October Revolution has cast its shadow over every subsequent generation of the French left, far beyond the ranks of the French Communist Party.

If this is the case, the reason for it lies first of all in the historical connections between the Russian Revolution and the national democratic tradition and especially the tradition of the French Revolution. The Bolsheviks were from the beginning obsessed with the Jacobin "precedent." On the other hand, nothing can be understood of their

---

Editor's Note: This essay first appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 1329, April 26, 1990, as "Les Feuilles mortes de l'utopie. Les Socialistes ont-ils encore des idées?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

influence on the French left without bearing in mind that the latter's heritage was made up of three basic ideas: that revolution implied violence, that the citizen could be regenerated by the state, and finally that the nation was the advance guard of human progress. In actual fact the Soviet experiment was largely seen by French public opinion through the filter of the French Revolution which itself was thereby transformed: prolonged, brought forward to the present, endowed with a mythology more contemporary than ever before. Thus the communists were able to perform their score on a broader keyboard than that of the working class, and either alternate or marry the themes of proletarian dictatorship and national union. They were thus able to use the origins of French democracy to give the October Revolution a sort of national legitimacy in France, among friend and foe alike.

In this way the revolutionary idea, of which they became the guardians and heirs, made it possible for the communists to exercise a sort of political trusteeship over the left as a whole – the revolutionary idea being, in my view, essentially the concept according to which the passage from one society to another, a precondition for the regeneration of individuals, can and should be accomplished in a brief period of time by the violent takeover of the state. In this sense, the revolutionary idea has until quite recently been common to the communists and socialists in France. One need only to go back to the famous speech by Léon Blum at the Congress of Tours in 1924: even as the great split was taking place, precisely when he was rejecting the Leninist model as a "putchist" deviation, the socialist leader was reaffirming the idea that the revolution must institute the dictatorship of the proletariat. To be sure, Blum can be credited with a less subjectivist interpretation of Marxism than Lenin's: he remains sensitive to the objective conditions required for the working class to take power. But he remains no less faithful to the analysis which looks forward to the Day of the Revolution – a day perhaps more distant than the one envisaged by Lenin, but the Great Day, nevertheless. Even in 1936 when he came to power, Léon Blum insisted on the distinction, in his view an essential one, between the short-term socialist program, a defensive and antifascist program making necessary the management of the capitalist system, and on the other hand the ultimate goal, which remained to destroy it.

It is true that in the political practice of the SFIO after World War Two this dichotomy could hardly survive intact. Guy Mollet took control of the party from the left, in 1946, but he governed in coalition with the Christian Democrats and the center-right. Between his rhetorical fidelity to revolutionary Marxism and his administration there was a great and lasting gap, and it grew to the point where it had to weaken the ideological appeal of the socialists precisely at a time when the com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

munists were waiting in the wings to offer socialist activists an ideological shot in the arm. In fact, however, the shot in the arm was finally administered from within the socialist movement, first by the PSU and then by the Epinay Congress. The rebirth of the Socialist Party in France was thus accomplished by a return of the activists to the tradition that had dominated French socialism for a century: the revolutionary Marxist tradition. And the new Socialist Party reconquered the left by brandishing the old slogans: class struggle, alliance with the Communist Party, nationalization of the industrial and financial systems, a break with capitalism once and for all.

It matters little here that tactical considerations entered into this conception. The important thing is that the socialist and communist ideologies, as they were perceived by leftwing activists in France (as opposed to public opinion as a whole, quite another matter) continued until late in this century to have a great deal in common, since both had emerged from the Jacobin and Marxist traditions. This could easily be demonstrated by retracing the history of communist revisionism in France, with its endless appeal, and it could also be illustrated and understood by comparing France and Germany. In Bad Godesberg, more than thirty years ago, in 1958, our German socialist neighbors buried the ideas of anticapitalism and revolution. They broke not only with Marx but also with Kautsky and rallied to Bernstein. To be sure, they did not have a powerful Communist Party on their left to worry about; their concern was to solidify the foundations of German democracy. The French went precisely in the opposite direction, the direction of the old unalloyed and undiluted ideology, and for the electoral victors of 1981 this would raise fearsome problems of political and intellectual adaptation. Obliged as they were to shift from the poetry of revolution to the prose of administration, the socialists did a great deal to reduce French politics to a rather dull and empty scene, with nothing very important at stake. Indeed, this very featurelessness became for them, finally, a mode of government.

But the main development took place elsewhere, in a far larger context. When the socialists came to power the communist idea was already dying in France. At least since Khrushchev, it was already dead in the communist countries, where Stalinism had left it moribund and all the revisionisms, from Gomulka to Dubček, had been unable to revive it. By this time the Poland of Solidarity was pointing in another direction: out. The French intellectual climate had changed: Solzhenitsyn's rise to popularity with the left in the 1970s was the most revealing sign of it. Since then, history has continued to lay bare the hopeless bankruptcy of the communist regimes, culminating in the extraordinary events of 1989 when it presented, as if in honor of the French Revolution, an ironical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

festival of "counter-revolutionary" revolutions. For what finally expired in 1989, under the guise of a renewal of the revolutionary repertory, was not only October 1917 but also the idea of humanizing October, of making it easier to live with. It will be objected that Gorbachev is still working at that, or so he says, but he himself is obliged to brandish slogans which negate the principles of October: the rule of law, "formal" constitutionalism, the separation of powers, not to speak of the market economy.

But doesn't all this amount to an homage to the French Revolution after all – in which at least the noncommunist left in France could take some comfort? Alas, even this consolation seems dubious. The French Revolution has been so thoroughly appropriated by the bolsheviks – constantly brandished as if they had some sort of lien on it – that no one in Prague, Budapest, or Warsaw laid claim to the heritage last autumn. Instead, and this was practically unheard-of in Continental Europe, the American Revolution, Madison and Jefferson were being cited in preference to Mirabeau and Robespierre. For my own part, I was surprised – in the course of a discussion with a leader of the interregional opposition party in the Soviet parliament (the left wing of Gorbachev, to the extent that the term retains some meaning) – to observe that his constitutional references were invariably to institutions of the United States. Thus has Jacobinism played its final trick on the French Revolution, by depriving it of its position as the ancestor of Europe's most recent rendezvous with freedom.

We must conclude therefore that the collapse of the communist idea affects the European left as such and not just the Communist parties. By dint of rediscovering the complementary and contradictory terms of the liberal equation, civil rights and the free market, as if they were new ideas, the European left casts doubt on what for two centuries has been the mainspring of revolutionary messianism: the notion that progress moves in a certain direction (for if capitalism follows upon communism, what becomes of history?) and at the same time, the hope of replacing capitalism with a society of producers freed from the commercial economy. It is thus not only Marxist revisionism, a favorite exercise of our intellectuals, that is deprived of its basis; it has become all but impossible to envisage a third way, a society that would escape the curse of both capitalism and communism.

Obviously, there exists a convenient escape from this dilemma, and that is to say that if the communist idea is dying, liberalism is hardly in much better shape, since no contemporary society will ever completely entrust its future to the hazards of the market. But no one is fooled by this false window. Liberalism has never been a formula for the operation of modern economies; it is a philosophy of man which existed long be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fore Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Balladur [Minister of the Economy in the Chirac government, a strong proponent of the market economy]. Its ambiguous nature and its contradictions have never ceased being argued by the best minds in Europe, from Hobbes to Marx via Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville, to mention only the most eminent. Capitalism and democracy are the double destiny of the modern individual, torn as he is in his inner aspirations. The communist idea, which Marx believed he could base on the science of history, proposed to separate these two destinies from each other and to achieve true democracy through the abolition of capitalism. What we are rediscovering, as this century comes to its end, is that the two conditions or destinies that modernity has knotted together are inseparable, that freedom does not exist without a free market, since those who thought they could evade this law have produced nothing but political and economic catastrophe. In this sense, we all find ourselves obliged to abandon the most radical aspect of the socialist utopia: the ideal of instituting a classless society that could devote all its energies to the conquest of nature. In short, we all find ourselves back within the parameters of the liberal order, since for all our societies – East, West, and South – the problem is in principle the same: how to manage disagreements of opinion and conflicts of interest. Seen from this angle, social democracy, for example, is merely one particular mode of managing liberal pluralism, as Manin and Bergounioux have recently shown in their book, *The Social-Democratic Regime*.

None of this is meant to constitute an apologia for capitalism, but simply to recognize the ambiguous universality of the world we live in, that we believed, mistakenly, we could put behind us. From Prague and Warsaw, and even from Moscow, the market economy is coming back to us, reappearing, together with the notion of human rights, revalorized by communist tyranny and endowed with unexpected prestige as a sort of social benediction. With the passage of time we must expect that this judgment will be attenuated, and that public opinion in those countries will learn once again that the critique of capitalism is quite as old as the capitalist economy itself, and was practiced by all the great liberal writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But for Western intellectuals, the problem is quite the opposite. It is less a matter of refuting an excessive idealization of the market economy, while continuing to smoke their opium, than it is of rediscovering the necessity of it, while seeking ways to make it work more effectively. The freedom to produce is a precondition of economic productivity; but from this it clearly does not follow that the distribution of commodities must be left exclusively to the market. There is no democratic society, beginning with the most capitalist of them all, the United States, that functions without a vast network of social redistribution. Nor on the other hand can any demo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cratic society allow the indefinite growth of the state to the detriment of the freedom, the initiative, and even the public spirit of its members.

In the short term, we can expect that the collapse of the Eastern regimes will signal a transformation of the political debate. Once it is clear that there will be no purely socialist societies, nor (in the economic sense of the term) any perfectly "liberal" ones, what will be the point of invoking these metaphysical constructions? Those who complain about the current aridity of public life are often those who contribute most to it through their own indifference to change. Nowhere is it written that the citizens of a modern society must choose between agitating in favor of extravagant ideas and immersing themselves in their private lives. The great thing is to see to it that they are not confined to such a choice.

In the longer run, but the sooner the better, the end of the communist idea should force us all to reexamine in depth the political culture in which Europe has been living for the past two hundred years. The democratic idea is more than ever our guiding principle, but it is this idea, precisely, that has just presented us with an earthquake for its birthday. Is it conceivable that we can go on our way unaffected when the whole earth seems to have trembled around us and we contemplate a landscape half-covered with ruins – and when the great source-idea, freedom, is looking more attractive than ever? The relationship between democracy and Christianity, between the republic and progress, between the state and its citizens, the dialectic of formal and social rights, modern man's aggressive approach to nature – these are all questions that can no longer be addressed today as they were addressed yesterday. The list is long, and for those who wish to reflect upon it there will be no lack of work to be done.

Translated from the French by H. J. Kaplan

WALTER LAQUEUR

Intellectuals and the Failure of Communism

The intellectual impact of the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe may well be less palpably felt in America than in Europe or the Far East for some time to come. There are a number of reasons why this is so. The study of the Soviet Union, of Eastern Europe, and of the third world has been strongly influenced for about two decades by a school of thought that in many articles and books, confer-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ences and seminars has exaggerated the achievements of communism and belittled its failures. While Lenin's mistakes and Stalin's crimes were not denied, it was argued that by and large, and in a long-term perspective, these were less significant than the political, social, and economic achievements of the communist regimes.

Such misjudgments have been by no means limited to the left; they have extended to the political and academic establishment, the media, and even Western intelligence – as shown, until very recently, by the erroneous estimates of the Soviet and East European economies. The doctrine of equidistance between East and West was fashionable, and in the 1970s it became bad form to use the term "totalitarianism" in the political discourse about the Soviet system. Even today this is widely considered a "loaded," that is to say "propagandistic," term. In the Soviet Union, firsthand experience has lent wide currency to "totalitarianism," and comparisons between Nazism and Stalinism are considered perfectly legitimate even among Communist Party members. Many such examples could be adduced: Soviet and East European comments on their recent history and on Marxist and radical ideology are far more outspoken and truthful today than those still heard in Western circles.

Why should Western thinking have been mistaken so often? This is a question of considerable importance that will be studied in the years to come. Yet it would be quite unrealistic to assume that events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe will produce a collective admission of guilt in Western revisionist thought. To own up to mistakes is a painful process, and, just as in daily life many prefer to think of justifications and excuses for their past behavior rather than admit error, many will think very hard of reasons why they might have been right after all. This kind of reaction is true even in the natural sciences, where ideology and political bias play only a minimal role. Max Planck, of quantum theory fame, once noted that the great controversies in the history of science have not been resolved by persuasion and admissions of mistakes but by the disappearance of the party which happened to be wrong. Since many "revisionists" are in their forties in age, the day of reckoning may be some considerable time off. A visit to almost any university bookstore in the United States and in Great Britain tends to show that, to give but two examples, Isaac Deutscher's *Stalin* (first published in 1949) and Geoffrey Barraclough's *Introduction to Contemporary History* (published in the early 1960s) are still used as basic textbooks for new generations of students. Their teachers obviously grew up with these books, and it does not make the slightest difference that these books were proved hopelessly wrong in the light of what has happened since then in the Soviet Union and the third world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Even if socialism were officially abolished in the Soviet Union and the other East European countries, this would not necessarily bring about the total collapse of Marxism as an ideology in the West. For it can always be argued that while the idea *per se* was correct and productive, it was a mistake to try to build communism in backward countries, and that the result elsewhere would have been quite different. It could be maintained that while the October Revolution was inevitable, Lenin erred grievously by suppressing democracy in the Soviet Union and Stalin compounded these errors by setting up his machine of terror. In brief, it is argued, communism is no more disproved by Stalinism than is Christianity disproved by the Inquisition and other similar aberrations.

Most of those who have argued for many years that America was as much (if not more than) to blame for the Cold War as the Soviet Union will no doubt continue to stick to their guns. It has already been said that there have been no winners and losers, for America has ruined herself in the course of an unnecessary arms race – not to mention the domestic political and psychological damage that has ensued – resulting in the militarization of our thinking and our political culture.

I find it impossible to discuss such views seriously; their proper place is in a satirical novel in the tradition of David Lodge or Malcolm Bradbury. (I wish that Robyn Penrose, Lodge's *Nice Work* character, a lecturer in English literature at the fictional Rummidge University, would travel one of these days, accompanied by his Professor Zap, to the strange world of the "revisionists.") Nor will they cut much ice beyond those in the media and *academe* who feel that they have to defend their record.

There are other, more weighty factors likely to limit the impact of the collapse of communism. This refers both to developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the postcommunist era and the events in the West, more specifically in the United States. It cannot be taken for granted that the transition towards a democratic order in these parts will be relatively smooth and uncomplicated and that it will be accomplished in the not too distant future. Some countries may make decisive progress on the road to freedom, but in most, including the Soviet Union, prospects are far from brilliant. As long as there is no substantial economic progress, social tensions will not be resolved but on the contrary may grow more acute. (In fact, such tensions may become more acute irrespective of economic progress.)

Nationalist passions may be running high and may become even more intense in the years to come, leading to violence on a massive scale. While communism is at present deeply discredited, it may well look better at the distance of a decade or two unless considerable progress is made. It will be argued, for instance, that for all their other sins, Stalin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and his successors at least suppressed national strife in their empire. And if the Soviet Union should disintegrate can we be sure that the emergence of a dozen sovereign Turkmenistans and Tadjikistans, much of the time battling each other, will be a major step to global peace and progress?

The failure of communism in Eastern Europe (or in Cuba, China, Vietnam, and elsewhere) will not have an immediate decisive impact on radical criticism of democratic societies. This is obviously because political views are shaped above all by events at home rather than abroad. Whether America will remain the greatest exporter of goods and services or whether its net savings rate will continue to slip, or whether high-tech exports continue to decline, may be of less importance than the doomsayers claim. But one needs hardly to enumerate all the major social ills from inner city ghettoes, the crime rate, the widening gap between rich and poor, to the sad state of American education and the scandalous backwardness as far as health and other social services are concerned, to realize that there is no room for complacency. To state that American capitalism has performed better than Soviet communism is a backhanded compliment. The complacency will probably give way in the coming years to an equally unjustified pessimism: if there has been an American decline, it is not irreversible.

It is quite unlikely that the collapse of communism will strengthen conservative parties in Europe. True, socialist parties in Sweden and the Netherlands have lost influence over the last few years, but France and Spain are ruled by social democrats, and their chances for electoral victory in Germany and Britain have improved in recent months. If their prospects are now better than a year or two ago, it is precisely because they have dropped much of their extremist and utopian ballast. The differences between the social and economic policies of the social democrats and the conservatives (which in the European context more often than not are really centrist parties) are less and less important: both are in favor of the market; both want to keep the welfare state. In essential respects, Europe has moved into a direction of which the early Fabians and Eduard Bernstein would approve.

In a recent issue of *Partisan Review* (#3, 1990), William Phillips quoted an American professor to the effect that recent events in Eastern Europe will "not reverse the impressive growth of leftist faculty in universities." I do not find the statement surprising at all, and Mr. Bowles is probably right, at least in the short run. Ever since Talleyrand wrote to Mallet du Pan about the Bourbons, *ils n'ont rien appris, ni rien oublié*, there are countless examples for the astonishing capacity of survival of Bourbonic ideologies. The fact that pan-Germanism had been defeated in the First World War did not affect the political views of large sections of the German middle class after 1918; Trotskyism continued to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exist in various parts of the world long after it had lost any relevance to the real world. One could think of many other examples; sectarianism has almost always flourished. A not inconsiderable part of the Soviet intelligentsia continues to pay respect, after all that happened, to Stalin or, alternatively, has been converted to belief in the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. A price, of course, has to be paid for sectarianism – political influence will be beyond its reach. But most sectarians do not even want political influence; they are perfectly content in their own little ghetto.

Isolation is part of the price they will pay, boredom the other. I find the literary and political magazines published in the Soviet Union infinitely more interesting these days than anything published in the West. The Western radicals have had their say, and for years they have been repeating themselves. Among Soviet intellectuals, on the other hand, there is an openness to new ideas, a willingness to confront past mistakes, an intellectual curiosity and sophistication for which one looks in vain nearer home.

With all this one should end perhaps on a note of cautious optimism. What Max Planck said about the outcome of great intellectual controversies may apply more to Europe than America. Intellectual fashions have a shorter life in this fickle country than elsewhere, perhaps because ideas (and ideology) are still not taken as seriously as in other parts. This may have sometimes welcome consequences; perhaps we shall be spared some of the intellectual agonies of the latter-day Bourbons.

There is another, more positive aspect. What our American professor calls "leftist" can mean a great many things. He mentions "scholarship critical of American capitalism" – something which Mr. Kevin Phillips has been doing of late with great effect. He also refers to Norway and Austria as role models for socialists. This is very tame stuff; who does not admire Norway? A year or two ago, I suspect, we would have been offered far more radical fare. If so, recent events did perhaps have, after all, some effect.

In the Soviet Union "leftist" or "leftwing" refers to the party of reform, even of revolution, against the existing order and doctrine; "rightwing" and "conservative" refers to neo-Stalinism and ultranationalism, as indeed it should. Despite decades of indoctrination, Soviet intellectuals eventually came to question the basic tenets, first Stalin, subsequently Lenin, and eventually Marx. I find it difficult to believe that a similar process will not take place sooner or later in American universities. The year 1989 was not the end of the socialist idea and the final, irrevocable triumph of the American way of life. The socialist idea may well have a future but only if those subscribing to it are ready to examine searchingly and honestly what went wrong and why. This is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bound to lead them away from most of the gods worshipped only yesterday, away from scientific claims and utopian extremism to the revisionism of a century ago. These revisionists of 1900 have long been discredited among the neophiliacs and considered intellectually unexciting. But, in retrospect, they are infinitely more relevant for those who have embraced the cause of political freedom and social justice.

SHLOMO AVINERI

Reflections on Eastern Europe

The dramatic developments in Central and Eastern Europe are of such far-reaching consequences that it is basically premature to assess their historical significance in a wider context. Beyond the obvious and immediate changes wrought by *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, and the disintegration of the communist regimes in the Warsaw Pact countries, we may yet lack the perspective necessary for such an historical evaluation. After all, anyone who would have attempted to sum up the French Revolution in 1790-91 – before the trial and execution of the King, before the Jacobin terror and before Napoleon – would have come to very different conclusions from what eventually became the conventional wisdom about the events started by the decision to convene the Estates-General. However, it has to be admitted that Edmund Burke managed as early as 1790 to assess rightly some of the dangerous potentialities inherent in some aspects of the revolutionary ideology.

Yet while bearing this caveat in mind, it is still possible to come to some conclusions about the nature of the regimes that have collapsed and about the historical processes involved in their demise. The first, and perhaps the most obvious conclusion, has to do with our assessment of totalitarianism. Jeane Kirkpatrick stirred more than one hornet's nest in her distinction between what she called "authoritarian" and "totalitarian" regimes. While the theoretical distinction was used by her merely as an ideological justification for United States support of right-wing authoritarian governments, mainly in Latin America, the argument she proposed did raise some serious questions, but what has recently happened in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe has totally invalidated her argument. The crux of this argument, it should be recalled, was that while authoritarian regimes, for all their hideousness, have internal mechanisms of change, totalitarian regimes, by their very nature, are wholly lacking in such mechanisms. Hence Western

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

democracies are justified in lending qualified support to authoritarian regimes while nudging them towards reforms, whereas totalitarian (that is, communist) regimes are wholly beyond redemption and should be vigorously opposed by the Western powers, as there is no chance that they could reform internally.

Soviet *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and the disintegration of practically all communist regimes in Eastern Central Europe, have been an outcome of internal forces, and thus Kirkpatrick has been proved totally misguided. If her theoretical framework has any validity, it should be stated somewhat differently. In terms of the chances of internal change, the dividing lines are actually between "right-wing" totalitarianism and "left-wing" totalitarianism. The conventional literature about totalitarianism has tended to underline the similarities between these two types of systems and viewed their differences mainly in terms of goals, but there is something much deeper involved here.

It can be stated as follows: in right-wing totalitarianism there is no gap between ideology and reality, between the "ought" and the "is." Fascism managed to install the kind of government it really wanted: if you wished to know what the ideals of the Nazi Thousand Year Reich were, you had only to look at the realities of the Nazi Third Reich around 1940 to see all of them in operation: monopoly of power, a hierarchical structure of state and society, anti-Semitism, power-politics, racial superiority, external aggression. The Nazis promised to "cleanse" German society from the Jews – and they did; they promised to reestablish German hegemony in Europe, to find *Lebensraum* for Germany in the East, to establish a New Order in Europe – and they did all these things, with a vengeance. Basically, there remained no gap between what the Nazis promised and what they achieved. Nazism was an ideology of domination, and it established a reality of domination. Buchenwald, Auschwitz, the cult of the Führer, the total control of society by the SS and Gestapo – all these were not aberrations of Nazi ideology: they were Nazi ideology as carried out into praxis. This is what the Nazis preached, and this is what they practiced.

In communist regimes, on the other hand, the picture is basically different. Communism is an ideology of emancipation and social justice – but communist regimes were based on enslavement and repression. Hence there always existed a gap between the emancipatory promise of communism and the actuality of "real-existing socialism": The Stalinist Constitution of 1936 was replete with paragraphs which were part and parcel of the European Enlightenment – the reality was something quite different. Hence, hypocrisy – or The Lie, as Havel has called it – became the operative principle of communist regimes. Repression was never justified as such, but as a necessary evil, something caused by the "counter-revolu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion," by the "kulaks." Beyond all the grimness there was always the hypocritical cant about emancipation and eventual social justice; even at the height of Stalinist repression, the state was supposed to wither away some day. Nazism, on the other hand, was free of hypocrisy.

It was this gap between idea and reality which gave the communist regimes their particularly sordid nature. But, dialectically, it also meant that there were always internal mechanisms and criteria, within communist ideology itself, by which these regimes could measure themselves – and find themselves wanting. A "socialism with a human face" was an attempt to bring communist reality in tune with communist ideals, which were after all derived from the Western Enlightenment tradition; there is no "Nazism with a human face," nor could one have been concocted out of the ideological themes of fascist or Nazi ideology.

Hence a Gorbachev – and a Dubček before him – could set out to reform a malfunctioning and repressive communist society by recourse to "first principles"; consequently, the reality of communism could be viewed as an abuse, and degeneration, of communist ideals. Nothing parallel did emerge or could have emerged in fascism.

The operative consequences are clear: communism has internal mechanisms of change, which may eventually carry communist regimes in their quest for reform beyond communist "first principles" to the common heritage of the Enlightenment. Fascism, on the other hand, did not have such internal mechanisms of change, and it could be changed only from the outside – through military defeat, occupation, and a forcible dismantling, from the outside, of the totality of its structures. No fascist regime has ever been changed from the inside.

Those who would like to use the Spanish and Portuguese examples as a refutation of this statement should recall that Franco's Spain was a complex structure, far from being a fascist state as such: it was a combination of military dictatorship, old-type reactionary state and church structures, plus a few fascist ingredients, mainly expressed through the Falange, which never enjoyed the role that the mass fascist and Nazi parties had in Italy and Germany. Similarly, Salazar's Portugal was an old-type authoritarian regime, with some corporative phraseology, but with no fascist-type mass party or ideology, and with relatively little state interference in economic activity. That their left-wing opponents called these regimes "fascist" because of their antidemocratic and antisocialist nature does not yet make them fascist in any analytical sense.

Kirkpatrick's paradigm has thus to be reformulated: it is right-wing fascist totalitarianism that cannot be changed from within, smashed only by external war. Leftwing totalitarianism, because of the internal tension between emancipatory ideology and repressive reality, does possess the potentiality for change, and it is this tension that can become – as it did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

become – a creative force for internal change and transformation. This also brings out the fact that leftwing totalitarianism, that is, communism, does after all belong to the Western, Enlightenment heritage – though this should in no way be used as justificatory or mitigating argument in defense of its repressive nature; fascism, on the other hand, is a head-on challenge to that emancipatory tradition. Hence it is beyond this pale, and hence one can envision a common agenda for Western democracies and a reformed, or totally restructured, communist regime, while coexistence with fascism was, and is, unthinkable.

Another reflection has to do with the concept of totalitarianism itself. We all know that originally this was a term used with positive connotation by the fascists – for example, by Mussolini in his article, "Totalitarianism," in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* of 1932. It was meant to connote the kind of government which is in control of all aspects of its subjects' lives: family, religion, the economy, the realm of ideas – all are subservient to the "higher" aim of national policy. During the height of the Cold War, the term came to connote – and now negatively – both fascist and communist forms of government and differentiate them from Western, liberal democracies, with their idea of minimal state interference in the various aspects of human life. In both cases the assumption was that a totalitarian state actually controls, more or less totally, those various spheres of human activity.

What the disintegration of the various communist regimes now suggests is that totalitarianism in this sense was in reality a Schoolmen's phantom – and it may not be an accident that the thinkers who helped to propagate its value as an analytical tool in the 1950s were students of ideas rather than empirical social scientists: Popper, Arendt, Talmon, Friedrich were all refugees from and victims of totalitarian regimes. They certainly knew what they were opposed to intellectually, but few of them actually lived in a totalitarian country for any length of time or studied it empirically. Hence they tended to analyze the *ideologies* of fascism and communism – their claim to total control – rather than question how successful this total control really was.

What emerges now from the ruins of the communist regimes is, paradoxically, how superficial and less than durable and effective this total control actually was. With the disappearance of communist regimes, what we see in most cases is the reemergence of ideologies and structures of the precommunist period. What is surprising is to see how strong those ideas and those commitments and structures really were – and how brittle the communist control of the minds and hearts of men and women proved to be. Thus, countries with a strong religious tradition – like Poland – emerge with a strong, Church-oriented opposition, and the historical Catholic-national political culture of Poland reemerges to-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

day from under communism not exactly intact – but somewhat stronger than before. In areas like the Czech lands of Czechoslovakia, the liberal, secular tradition of Bohemia comes again to the fore; on the other hand in the case of Rumania, the lack of democratic traditions before the communist takeover makes the transition to democracy problematic, and the historical ethnic conflict with Hungary over Transylvania – submerged for almost fifty years – reappears with all its force and violence. It all appears as if nothing has been lost and nothing has been forgotten.

The German case brings this out most strongly: once the Berlin wall disappeared, there disappeared with it the *raison d'être* of a separate East German state. Forty-five years of totalitarian control and a power monopoly by a party that preached the uniqueness of the "first workers' and peasants' state on German soil" just evaporated into thin air.

This appears to apply, *a forteriori*, to the Soviet Union itself. It becomes clearer daily that the Soviet Union is disintegrating into its ethnic and national components. Russian nationalism, with its orientation to the Orthodox Church, its xenophobia and anti-Semitism, appears, phoenix-like, out of the ashes of the discredited communist regime. Ukrainian nationalism, with its adherence to the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church, especially in Western Ukraine, reappears as if seventy years of communism never existed. And in the Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics historical enmities (such as the Armenian-Azeri conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and so on) become the salient feature of political life. The Jewish reawakening in the Soviet Union has also to be seen in the context of this reemergence of a historical form of self-consciousness which seventy years of virulent atheistic propaganda and sometimes vicious anti-Jewish measures did not succeed in obliterating.

In short, it appears that in reality totalitarianism is much less total in its control than its own propaganda – and its enemies – alike have assumed. For most Western observers, Soviet reality was what was written in *Pravda* – though there were, of course, sophisticated ways to decode the obvious lies and blatant falsehoods propagated in its pages. What was not always decried by Western observers was that beyond the *pays légal* depicted by the official organs of the party in power there always exists a *pays réel*, where people continue to live and act in almost complete independence from official ideology and structures, even if they occasionally pay lip service to them. Anyone reading Vaclav Havel's *Disturbing the Peace* must realize how strong this parallel civil society was even during the height of communist repression. Western observers appear to have been as surprised as the wielders of power in Eastern Europe by the brittleness and superficiality of the official layers of these societies. It appears that totalitarianism as a concept is much less helpful as an analytical tool in explicating these societies than many observers imagined. Perhaps talk-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing about parallel structures – an official one and a multitude of unofficial ones – is a better way of looking at these societies.

A final comment about some lessons to be drawn from what has been happening with regard to the theoretical tenets of Marxism: It will continue to be argued – and I am not going into the argument here – whether the collapse of Soviet-type communism proves that Marxism was wrong as such, or whether Marxism had no chance of reaching its goals when imposed dictatorially on premodern and pre-industrial societies like Russia and other East European countries. But what is beyond dispute is that on one major issue, Marx – and Marxism – were totally wrong, and this is the issue of nationalism.

Traditional Marxism saw nationalism as either a remnant of premodern eras or as a mere "building-block" of modern, industrial societies (as in the case of Bismarckian Germany). The proletarians, according to Marx, have no homeland, and Marxist socialists usually proceeded on the assumption that class solidarity will eventually triumph over narrow, particularistic national interests.

It is fascinating to observe that while it appeared that after all the proletarians did have a homeland, and were sometimes very chauvinistic in defending and supporting it, the famous dictum that "the proletarians have no homeland" did reflect a real cognitive situation of a certain class of people: not the proletarians, though, but the multitude of modern, educated deracinated Jewish intellectuals, without whom a revolutionary movement would have been unthinkable in Central and Eastern Europe. To what degree socialism became the New Homeland for this stratum of secularized Jews is one of the most fascinating chapters of modern European – and Jewish – history, in which communism and Zionism become the two polarized solutions to the same problems of identity and self-consciousness.

Nothing, it appears, could be more wrong than this dismissal of the national issue by traditional Marxism. The Austro-Marxists were to see this fallacy, and they tried to find a solution that would combine socialist ideology with an historical link to national and language-based culture on the part of the working-class. Earlier, Moses Hess, in his controversy with Marx over nationalism, tried something similar in a less theoretically sophisticated way, and the Marxist Zionists grappled with the dilemma and were haunted by it well into the 1960s. Be this as it may, there is now no doubt that the major failure of communism lay in its total disregard for the autonomy of culture – including national culture – in the affairs of man. Lenin's feeble attempt to leave some cultural leeway to the non-Russian nations of the Soviet Union became irrelevant when confronted with the centralized political power emanating from Moscow and carried out mainly by Russians or Russified wielders of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

power (like Stalin, who the Georgians nowadays claim was not really a Georgian but an Ossetian. *Sic transit*. . . .).

In Eastern Europe, as well as in the Soviet Union, it is national identity and questions of national culture that have become hegemonic, and it is such issues of nationalism that appear to be directing the flow of events. We already have remarked how German nationalism has became hegemonic, once the Berlin wall disappeared. Even in Yugoslavia, where the Titoist example gave the national entities more autonomy than anywhere else in Eastern Europe, the federative structure appears to be disintegrating along national lines. While the fluidity of the present situation in the Soviet Union makes it impossible to try to predict the nature of its future political structure, there is no doubt that this structure will be determined by the nationalities issue more than by any other considerations. This will be so whether the Soviet Union manages to survive as a more or less coherent body politic, or if it disintegrates into its national components. In either case, the national structure will become dominant.

In this blindness to nationalism, Marxism – paradoxically – has a kindred soul in modern Western liberalism: you will find very little about nationalism in John Stuart Mill – or, for that matter, in John Rawls. This should not be surprising, as both Marxism and liberalism hail from the Enlightenment, with its universalisms and its utter unease about particularism and specificities. But just as Western liberalism learned how to overcome this abstract universalism on many levels (how defunct now are Tom Paine's revulsion against "faction" and Rousseau's similar abhorrence of anything that appears inimical to the *volonté générale*), so any socialist thought of the future will have to learn – among other lessons to be drawn from the Soviet debacle – that the question of nation and national culture and identity has to be reframed and restated. The old simplistic answers won't do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES DICKEY

The Promised Fire

At the new altitude we went into the bomb run. The bombardier, Lieutenant Madison, took over the plane, and we steadied on through the run, getting off the two-thousand pounders and the payload of incendiaries we had, maybe as a warm-up for the big raid the Colonel had been talking about. It's always a relief when you get the bombs off the racks and out of the plane. Major Sorbo circled us without drawing flak or any more fighters, and I could see two fires, one a lot bigger than the other, where we had hit the city, or the other planes had. It was an easy enough run so far. We were supposed to have dropped some two-thousand pounders, some incendiaries and some frag bombs on the Kiba area of Toyko, the waterfront, and we had, and now we could pick up the home heading and get out of there.

The next thing was not fire, though later I realized that it had to do with fire, had fire in it, but it did not seem like fire that was separate from us, or that could have been to one side of us, or above or below us. No; it was like the inside of the plane had exploded, and that we, each one of us, had exploded. It was like we were *inside* an explosion, or that maybe we had exploded from inside ourselves. That's as close as I can come to saying it. Major Sorbo was just coming out of the turn for home when it happened.

When I could think I saw I was over the butts of my guns. The wind was knocked out of me, but I could move all right, and I held to the strap of my seat-harness and turned around.

The plane leaned up on one wing like it was going into a turn, but it kept leaning; nobody could have been controlling it and making it do any such way. Then the nose went down, and I knew we were completely gone; everybody on the flight deck was probably dead. One of the waist gunners, I think it must have been Ledford, was stretched out right in the middle of the air, his arms and legs going wild trying to fetch up against something solid. Then he was gone – on the floor, on the wall, the ceiling, I couldn't tell. Equipment was flying all over the inside of the plane; you couldn't tell what anything was, except that I saw a chest-chute bounce off one wall and a hand reach out for it and miss, and the chute was gone and the hand was gone. We were nose-down now; spinning; the wings were going around the airplane.

"Man, I am here, " I heard myself say, and it didn't surprise me too

---

Editor's Note: "The Promised Fire" is excerpted from the novel by James Dickey entitled *To the White Sea*, to be published by Houghton Mifflin and Company.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much. I unbuckled from the seat, and just as soon as I did I banged against a wall. But I was holding on to the seat-strap web, and I kept holding on to it, and worked my feet forward into the plane. I got banged around a lot, swinging like a clapper in a bell, but I caught onto another web-strap – it must have been one of the ones for storage – and pulled on toward where the chutes had been, and the hatch was.

The chute I had taped was still taped, the only one there, and I pulled it loose, and, one hand after the other, holding to the strap with one hand and buckling with the other, I snapped it to my chest, over the emergency kit, everything going round and round faster and faster.

The hatch was only a few feet farther on, and I scrambled and twisted along to it, and pulled the two pins. The hatch stayed. And then the only lucky thing of the night happened. The ship yawed like it had been hit again, and swung me on the strap away from the hatch, so that I could get my feet around. When the plane swung back the other way it swung me, too, and I hit the hatch with both feet, with everything I had.

It was gone. I could see the sky whirling, outside the hole in the plane. The air would knock your teeth loose, but it was outside air. I had my door to the open, and went out through it, and had the whole thing, the whole sky.

The first thing was the cold, but, like I said, not the right cold. I was tumbling – sometimes I saw stars and sometimes I didn't see anything, anything but black – and the wind seemed to whip the air out of my nose sideways. But I could see enough to tell that I had some altitude, enough to open the chute, and I waited a little to figure the best way to do it. You're supposed to be facing the ground, with your head a little lower than your feet, when you pull the chute, so that when the lines pay out and the chute opens the risers will swing you under, and you won't get that terrific grab up through the crotch, that might be bad in a lot of ways. I spread out my arms to try to stabilize, and it was as easy as something in a dream. It crossed my mind how out of control the plane had been, there at the last, and how easy it was to control the way I was falling, and for a second it seemed to me that a man ought to be able to fly without an airplane.

But that was dangerous; I could have held on to the notion too long. I felt for the handle, and took hold of it with my right hand, though I hated to pull my arms back in; I was half-believing they were wings. Dangerous, like I say. Then I put my left forearm across my face, because with a chest-pack the risers whip right across your face when they come out, and pulled.

Something stuck. I pulled again, and it still stuck. I pulled again, hard as I could, and the handle came away; it felt like I had thrown

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loose my whole arm; thrown my arm away, but I was still falling, turning over from the position they'd taught me. What the hell, I thought; that's all I can do.

I was shot, through the armpits and between both legs. There'd been a loud pop, a crack like a rifle, that had been the shot, and I had sure been hit. My face had taken a lick, too; I felt of it, and it was wet on one side.

But the chute was open. I looked up at it, and started to make my thinking include it, and the reason for the cracking sound, and the new hurt under my arms and between my legs. The chute. It was the chute. I was in a very big, quiet place in the middle of the air, and not shot. Not shot. I couldn't get rid of the idea that I had been.

I looked around, from my float, from my big wide calm place in the middle of things. Swaying back and forth, I concentrated on the situation; it was the first time I had ever tried to concentrate and sway at the same time, and it was not a bad feeling, though I wouldn't want to do it every day.

Right under me was dark, but to my left was a lot of silver, very beautiful, too. Water, sure enough; it went way out, out into the moonlight as far as I could see. I was not far from all that silver, and I started to wonder about where I would hit. Breaking a leg was not part of my plan, but you can always do that in the dark, and I couldn't see anything right under me, at all. I felt for the risers, because I knew I could control where I hit, or control it to a certain extent. But I didn't have anything to sight on except the water. I think I could have slipped the chute enough to land in the water, just barely, but what would have been the good of that? I didn't need to be wet; I needed to be on the ground with no broken bones, dry and figuring.

Even though I couldn't see where I was going to come down, I was not near enough to the ground so that I couldn't spill part of the chute and make a move – a little move – in any direction I wanted, but it was the dark or the water, no matter what, and the more I thought about it the more I wanted the land. How close to the water, though? How close to the docks, or whatever was there? I didn't want to land on top of a building that I couldn't get down from, or on somebody's roof, if I could help it.

I was getting closer. I could hear a siren, a lot like the ones the Air Force has. I looked inland toward the fires. The smoke came past me, and there was cordite in it, from some of our bombs. About a half mile from me there was a lot of stuff burning, and I hoped that would keep people away from where I was going to hit.

I was still high enough to get a fairly good view. I could see the docks now, and the ocean spreading out in another way from the first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way. Between me and the water there were some big shadows, tall, thin and bent, and I could see through them, see the ocean, like silver cloth that's been slung out and ruffled and sewed together with black thread: all that, on the side toward the moon.

Quicker than I would have thought it could be done to me, there was a terrific clutch up between my legs. Under my shoulders, too. My shoulders stopped where they were, and so did I, jigging up and down in the harness, wondering what the hell. I must have still been fifty feet off the ground, and I was hanging. Not hurting, but hanging, and could have swung myself if I'd had a mind.

I looked up at the risers. The chute was collapsed, and hung up on something, one of the things that made the long shadows, maybe, or were the long shadows, themselves. Though there were not any lights, I could make out the space between the buildings and the water, and I couldn't see anything that looked like a man. If I could get down without anybody seeing me, I could go on to whatever might be next, on my own.

But I couldn't just hang there in the smoke, which was colored with red, and seemed to have some kind of wind that came with it, shifting back and forth, turning one way, then back the other. I felt down in it with my feet, felt around on all sides, twisting in the harness, trying to make contact, but there was not anything there for me. I pulled on the risers, to see how my strength was, and I had some. I started up the lines, arming it out, hand over hand. When I reached the bottom of the nylon, like a sheet half-off a bed, I went past it to where the chute was caught, and felt for what it was caught on.

It was a gantry, a loading-crane I was on, and at least fifty feet from the ground. Holding to the metal, I unsnapped the chute, and was a lot freer, just in a second. I worked up the crane and out the arm to where the chute was caught, and cut it loose. A back-swirl of the crazy smoke-wind caught it, and it disappeared, collapsing, toward the buildings back from the docks. I housed the knife, crawled head-first back along the arm, and started down the main body of the crane, not hurrying, but little by little, watching and listening all-out. The cross-pieces of the thing hurt my feet pretty bad, when I put both of them in the same place, and there was one section where I just had to slide down one of the main beams, shinny, kind of, but I did it. Getting to the ground was something I could tell I was going to be able to do, by now. When I got to the top of the cab I turned loose all the beams and struts and looked around, and there still wasn't anybody there.

There was a ladder on the cab, and I used it. The ground was level cement, and full of power. I leaned against the wheel of the cab, in the shadow away from the moon. The smoke was still blowing, though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

maybe not so much, and somewhere in it, down the dock from where I was, I heard voices, and they were coming. I hit a stillness, a new stillness like a marmot's, and two little men came by shorter than me, even, almost transparent with smoke, talking right into each other's faces. I hadn't had time to find the chute, and I hoped they wouldn't notice it, wherever it was. I had my hand on my knife, but didn't even crack the blade to light, to any sort of light; I didn't want to give light a chance at it, even though I was in the shadow of the crane. They went past till I couldn't hear them.

Using every bit of cover on the dock, I went looking for the chute, and finally found it spread and crumpled over some barrels and boxes, like it was making a display. I bundled it up and shoved it under the boxes, piled some other boxes and crates on it, then walked back a ways toward the crane – it was friendly – and tried to size up the situation, decide what to do. I really didn't have any notion just then; just a feeling something like the one I got when the guns of the fighter sparkled and I knew he was on the pursuit curve; a feeling that was a kind of guess but not completely; a guess with another thing added to it, something I didn't have a name for. I didn't want a name. It was not words.

What did I need? Where the bombs had hit had been concentrated in one place, I had seen from the chute, but the smoke was fading off now and I couldn't hear any more sirens. In other words, I couldn't bank on people having to deal with the fire. And the bomb drop was only in a small part of Tokyo. Since I hadn't seen any night watchmen on the ocean-side of the docks, I thought I might have a look down the streets between the dock-buildings, and try to find out what they went into. I edged out past the corner of the warehouse nearest to the crane, looked as far as I could toward the city, and then started down that way, in the fullest and longest shadows I could find. If I saw a single person I would turn back, and try something else.

I got almost to the end of the building, and could see a little way into the blacked-out blocks, when I heard voices; not one or two but a lot. A whole crowd went by the end of my truck-alley, talking fast. There was no light but moonlight, but I could make them out against the cement of the street, and the light-colored buildings on the other side. I couldn't have dealt with them; I had no odds going for me.

Using the same shadows I went back to the dock, and to the crane. What had bored me before, the words of the Colonel at the briefing, all his talk about fire, came up in my head, and all over me. Fire was what I needed; fire from my own side. I needed a whole city in panic, a lot of confusion, as much as there could be, and things would be different. I didn't know when the raid would come, but I knew that it would be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

soon. Soon. Maybe a day; another night. I would find a way to wait it out.

In the first shadows again, working from one crane to the other, I made it to the end of the dock, and just stood, paying attention, all the attention I had, to what was there, to what was only a step or two away, or might have been, in a few more. Where the docks and the warehouses gave out there were more docks, more warehouses. But I was interested in the field between, and what happened when it came together with the water.

There was no ladder down. I couldn't tell exactly, but I judged it was not far to the ground, though. I hung by my hands off the edge of the concrete, and dropped.

I hit almost right away. The field, whatever kind of ground it was, was slanted toward the water, and I didn't count on that, and hit wrong and fell. I rolled and had my knife out and ready to come up, but there was nobody around. Since it was out, I took the satisfaction of watching the blade flash off the moon. I looked around and did it again, and the satisfaction was as much as anybody could have wanted.

I could see a lot better, too, and I won't say that it wasn't because of the knife flash. Steel that good, and that big silver light full of thread; well you can't tell what it might do. Like I tell you, I believe in things like that. It don't matter why.

The field was set against the water by a kind of wall, cement, a breakwater I think somebody called it. I inched along the top of it on my belly, like a lizard, running my hand, trying to feel if there might be some kind of hole in it, some place I might be able to wedge into. It took a long time to do it, and I really hadn't come all that ways from the docks when I felt into something; something not concrete, but hard and wet. I smelt of my fingers, and knew exactly where they'd been. Using one of my matches, letting it burn nearly all the way down to my fingers, I got a good notion of what was there: a sewer pipe that fell off into the ocean, big enough to hold a man; not running too much, but some. I let myself down, and put my feet in.

The smell put my eyes out; I mean, it hit my eyeballs like the worst light, and one that would never quit. My eyes, you know, and that was not meant to be. But it was a hole, and I could go on into it, if I wanted to. I took out another match, and lit it, though I knew that sewers could blow up. That would be something else, I said to myself, to get out of a B-29 on fire and blow yourself up with shit-gas. But nothing blew, and I went on up, amongst the squishing shit and other stuff, to where there was a turn, where I was damn sure nobody would come. To do it they'd have to come the same way I had, and I couldn't think of anybody who'd do that, not even the Japs, no matter what.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For one day, maybe for a day and a night, I had shit and safety. What else, I asked myself: what else have you got a right to ask for, in the enemy's own damn country? His main city? What else?

I broke back out, and the big air was good, I tell you. The moon was higher, and the stars were so strong they seemed to be blasting light at me, like studs or screw-heads that had that kind of power. I broke off a stalk of something from the field and marked the sewer, and started back along the breakwater, this time standing up. So far, things were working: the whole thing was working, right where I stood, where I walked along the silver ocean of the Japs, and looked out over the big sewed-together bay.

When I got back to the crane I had a sudden thought. How quick could I get to the pipe? I looked at my watch and took off, running light as I could along the front of the warehouses, my moon-shadow in front of me. When I hit the end of the dock I took off, right into the air over the field, like I was trying to jump from the cement loading slabs of my dock toward that other one off as far as I could see, and I hung up there over the field-dark for the longest time, almost like being in the chute again, except that this time it was just me instead of a lot of harness and nylon, and when I hit this time I didn't fall. I found the stalk of stuff I'd left at the edge and let myself down into the hole; swung in, and my eyes were stinging.

I came out again and went back to the crane, listening for night watchmen but not all that much. It was two-thirty in the morning. I didn't have any notion of sleeping in the shit-pipe, so I climbed into the cab; it cut off the wind and had a big seat, big enough for two people. I took the control-handles, set them off from the seat, and stretched out. I didn't know when they went to work on the docks in Tokyo, but I figured I could get at least a couple of hours of fresh-air sleep before anybody came; before that I would hit for the pipe.

I wanted to sleep in control, and not just like some desperate guy with no chance. There were certain things I had, and I knelt down on the floor of the cab and went over them, holding the matches down below the windows.

My knife I knew about, and left it alone, this time. I laid out my forty-five and two clips. There was no telling where I might use them, but it would either have to be in a place where nobody could hear, or a situation with so much noise and confusion that nobody'd care, or even notice. I thought about the Colonel's fire, and decided that I would wait a day or two in the whole concentrated stink of Tokyo, crammed into a little pipe, for them to bring the fire: for them to bring the fire, and make a situation where I could operate.

I needed to get outfitted, and that meant I needed some clothes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

different from a wired-up combat rig, a flight-suit underneath it, and GI brogans. I couldn't last long in Tokyo, either in daylight or at night, in what I had on. If the fire came – *when* the fire came – I would go out with the forty-five and get what I needed.

I broke open my emergency kit and spread the stuff on the seat, wondering what situations might come up where I'd use it: use this thing and then that thing. There was a little knife that I could use for little doings, like cutting string or scaling fish. There was a packet of fish-hooks and some twine. There was a silk map of part of Japan, like a handkerchief printed with a topo layout of Japan up to the strait between Honshu and Hokkaido, and another piece of silk that had an American flag on it, and writing in five or six different languages; the Intelligence Officers told us that Japanese was one of them. I couldn't read them, but all the crews had had to memorize what they said: *I am an American aviator. My aircraft is destroyed. I am an enemy of the Japanese. Please take me to the nearest American authorities. The government of my country will pay you.* Like I say, I couldn't read any of this stuff, but I looked at all that writing, in Annamese, Burmese, Thai (it said), French, and Japanese, and I struck a blank wall on whether I should keep it. I looked by the match-light, before the match went out, and tried to make a decision. But it was funny, anyway, and I think I laughed, right there in the cab, and real loud, too.

It was quiet there. I sat on the floor of the cab with my things on the seat: gun, bullets, fishhooks, map, blood-chit with all the languages, and leaned back against the metal of the wall. Nothing, nobody, could be more out of luck.

Except that there could be. Both times, it was myself, and I knew that when I got down into the pipe – when the sun came up had to get down into it – I would be even worse off, and if the fire didn't come down on Tokyo it was only a question of time before somebody would find me, if I didn't drown in the flood of Tokyo shit, and no matter how hard I fought or however many I might be able to kill, I would lose. I would have my balls cut off, I would have my head cut off, and that would be it.

But not yet. I took out the C-rations and wound the key around the can. It was not so bad: a kind of cold hash, and I ate it all, and stretched out on the seat, when I'd put my stuff back the way it was. There was really nothing to worry about. I had the next day planned, and the Colonel's B-29s would come, or they wouldn't. That was not up to me.

There was a long dream in which a buffalo, something I had never seen except in pictures, ran across in front of me, and for some reason I couldn't move my eyes or my head, but had to stare front and center

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

while he went by. He was big, and for some reason I felt like I could even ride on his back, but I couldn't reach him, or give him any notion of how I felt. He went across in front of me, on some kind of a raised platform that was like a breakwater; it was the breakwater that made the buffalo be there, like he was. There was no doubt about it in the dream, or when I woke up, either.

It was all good; I mean it; all the problems were for the next day. Nobody was going to check the cab of a loading-crane between three and five in the morning, no matter what the city was, no matter what the war was. I woke up, more or less, saw that it was still black dark, saw one star, and went back, waiting for the buffalo to come across again, on a line just above the ocean. That was something beautiful.

Light, and I was dead. I knew it, and kept watching for it. Sometimes I looked, actually, and at other times I looked in my sleep and it was the same; through my eyelids it was the same; I could see the sun, and water. But when I heard feet, and voices amongst them, I knew I couldn't give away any more. I raised up, and twenty or thirty guys were going by, right by me, on their way somewhere. As much as I could, just at eye-level over the bottom of the window, I watched where they went. The light was gray; it was first dawn, and if I was going to get into my hole I had better do it before much longer. Little by little I let myself out of the cab, and dropped down between the rails. Most of the men had gone into the warehouses, as far as I could tell the few others would go in when they got around to it. I looked at my watch. It had taken me nineteen seconds to get to my hole before. Could I do it now? Could I time it so that nobody saw? Out on the range, the Brooks Range, I had got where I was scared of the human voice; you didn't expect there to be one. I knew now that, when I made my move, if anybody sang out, I was dead. I crouched down between the rails and put my head up one more time. All but two or three of the men had gone into the warehouses, that they were opening up with big sick clangs and scrapes of galvanized iron. I stared at one especially, who kept hesitating and looking back out at the ocean. I made him the one that things turned on, and when he took a step or two toward the buildings, I broke.

I was on the wall in a second, not hunching but putting my head down and digging, but digging light, and there was not a sound but me. When I got to the piece of reed I had stuck up I hit the top of the breakwater side-on and slid over, my feet going into the hope; I even broke off the stalk with my hand as I went down.

There I was. All the time I was growing up on the Brooks Range I was on the side of the hunters, the foxes and weasels and lynxes, on the side of the wolverines, because we were doing the same thing; we were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hunting the others. But when I got my feet into the sewer-pipe, and was sure I was in that hole in the side of the sea-wall, that I had found it and had come back to hide in it, I knew a little about things from the other side that I hadn't thought about, or thought about enough. I knew how the marmot feels when he makes it to his hole, how the badger feels, how the snowshoe hare feels when he understands that the color that's been given him is right, that it works, or works right now, anyway, that nothing can get him because nothing can find him. Any animal would have had a better hole than I had, but it was all the same thing; we were in our place, me and the rest of them.

But my God, it was awful. I wasted another match, and risked blowing up on shit-gas, to get back to the curve, and went on up beyond it and sat down in the shit and other slow-moving stuff. I waited, but I couldn't stay there long, and edged on out toward the ocean until I could see it, and smell it, through the shit and God knows what else was in there.

All day, I was in it. All day, counting on the night and the fire. I had put it into my head that I shouldn't show anything around the curve of the pipe, because if anybody found the chute there would be an all-out search; somebody might even have a look into the pipe, or at least shine a flashlight up it. But I would be sure to hear them before they did, and could duck back. So, as it turned out I spent most of the day at the curve, looking out at the sky, which was a little blue circle at the end of everything, and that filled up with whatever I wanted to be there.

The caribou had been good to me, in my mind, especially since we took the first hit in the '29; before that I hadn't known how good. Them coming out of the woods was a beautiful thing to think. In such huge space they were, in snow that was more like ice, a little cautious, a little slow, but all of them coming, and then all in the open, in the overcast light that makes the snow more merciless than it is any other time, in the long afternoon that never ends. And then they are gone off into the winter range, and there's nothing left but the snow. Let there be a little more fall-down, I said, more snow. The caribou are good; the tracks are beautiful and good, but let the snow drift them down, let it drift them under.

It happened. The eye of the pipe I was in went away so far that there was not any more of it; everything there was snow. The snow of the Brooks Range, or some other snow. But snow: snow: not a track on it. I knew, then, what I needed to do. The little compass would point north, no matter what I did; whether it was outside my body or in it. North was north, and it would stay that way. And there was the pull of something else to go with it; that other thing that was not called

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

north, but was at the same place; the thing nobody could say.

By feel I pulled out the compass again, though I didn't want to take too much of the adhesive off my body-tape. It would be better, though, if I knew whether the compass was luminous or not; it was, and that was good; night was going to be my time, at least until I got to the heavy snow. "An asshole compass, " I said out loud, my voice coming back from the sides of the pipe and maybe having some kind of roundness to it, from the shape of the galvanized tin or iron, or whatever I was in, looking off at the little circle of nearly-black blue that was the bay, the ocean, the rest of the world. "Some compass, " I said, to the echo. "Right here I've already got a pretty close connection to half the assholes in Tokyo." The pipe walls told me it was so, and the slow moving stuff I was sitting in. I wondered how I would smell when I got out among people; something would have to be done about it, first thing. "Come on, boys," I said to Tinian Island, out through the round walls and the little ocean at the end of them. "Come on with all that fire. Let me out of this place. Come on, night. Come on, fire."

I thought of the snow, and one long kayak trip I took with an Eskimo buddy, Tornarssuk, east toward Kakrovik, hunting for seals. At one place we went by a big glacial berg that calved-off about half a mile from us with a sound like a woman who had been reamed up through the gut. When the ice slid off the near side of it the brightest blue I ever saw in my life came right at us, it seemed like, so deep and pale it could have been some new kind of scientific thing, a new kind of light that nobody had ever seen before. The ice just slid down off it, and it was there, a thing, a new color just invented, but one that had also been waiting in the ice for a long time, a real long time, just for two guys in a kayak to see it; we were the only ones who did.

We sat there for a while. Tornarssuk had his paddle out of the water, and I looked at myself for a second, and I had, too. We just stared off at that pale blue that came to us out of the big white; that came to us and right through us, and I didn't ask Tornarssuk what he was doing, or why he was doing it for so long, because I knew all that. There is not much color in an Eskimo's life; not more than three or our that that's on the ground, the blue of the sky when it's clear, the gray-green of the ocean when the floes break up, and red, which is blood, the brightest blood in the world, wherever you see it up there. So I let Tornarssuk stare on, let the split glacier come into him as it must have been doing into me – that pale, concentrated pure huge-sided light, and I used it now, in the shit-tunnel, as part of the plan I was making. In the pipe I sat like I had in the kayak with Tornarssuk, with the iceberg coming through me. Every now and then I brought in the red of the far wall of my father's cabin, as I would see it coming in off the Range, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

red as any blood in the snow, but always I came back, without trying, to the calm ocean and the berg, with the pack-ice around the base of it, giving that light, just-invented blue color at me, keeping my paddle out of the water. That was the afternoon.

The blue-black at the end of the pipe left me, little by little, and even the circle of the pipe, at least as far as my being able to see it was concerned. I would give it another hour by my watch, and then poke my head out and see if I could pick up Polaris.

I didn't make it to the end of the pipe, or at least not right then. The whole thing squeezed together all at once, from all sides but especially the top, and drove my eardrums back into my head, pushed toward each other by some big quick clamp, like earphones coming together a hundred times harder than they were supposed to. There was a sound when this happened, but my head hurt so much from the in-driving on my drums that I didn't remember it until later. It was a big thump, though, one that was in the air, most likely; was made out of air, but had body to it; a lot of body, just for a second. The pipe shook with it; the water going past me sloshed. It happened again. I sucked on my tongue – what I would have done in the aircraft when we changed altitudes – and started to crawl. It was not Polaris I was looking for now: those were explosions. "Come on," I said, crawling hard. "Come on. Let them have it. More. All you got." And then, "Let *me* have it." There in the shit-pipe, heading for the outside to stay out, I called that fire down; I did all I could, from where I was.

I got out and stood up, and looked back inland. There was a low red glow, very wide, with some white in it. I hadn't even straightened up when four or five more bombs hit, all in a line and spaced more or less even with each other. The line must have covered at least a mile, and right away the fire went wider, and a lot higher. There was already smoke, though the docks, at least my part of them, hadn't been hit.

But there were people on them, and I wasn't used to that, at night. They were running back and forth amongst the cranes, and in between the bombs I could hear them screaming and gabbling. That was the way I wanted it, sure enough, and I took off across the field toward the fire, running easy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI

The Demise of Historical Man

The *homo historicus* I'm talking about is a modern invention, more exactly, an inner reaction against modernity. It has been said many times that being human and nonhistorical is inconceivable; that a mankind robbed of historical consciousness is a monstrosity, perhaps a self-contradictory concept, and that collective memory as it was crystallized in historical knowledge is not only a necessary condition but the very foundation of our self-identity as beings that live in a human, that is communal, way. This commonplace is hardly controversial, but our historical orientation in this obvious sense does not make us historical men in the modern meaning. People have always been interested in their collective past, of course; they have always needed – as a tribe, a nation, a religious community – a mythological foundation for existence, whereby they both knew the origin of the world in which they lived and grasped its sense.

History, meant as the knowledge of origins, was functionally mythological, no matter in what proportions in the narration truth and fiction were mixed. What did matter was the awareness of self-grounding, of the legitimacy – established at the beginning of time – of people's collective existence. Mythological history provided people not only with an interesting explanation of their provenance but, moreover, with the principle of legitimacy and therefore with the meaning of present life, a meaning that was set up and defined, so to say, at the source of being. The grounding fact was not just a fact, not an accidental event that as well could have not happened; the fact carried its own necessity, and in this sense it was timeless or taken out of factual temporality.

This archaic historicity, this habit of relating one's own life to a validity-giving, absolute and petrified beginning, was indispensable for societies of which the distinctive characteristic was what Edward Shils calls "primordiality," societies bound together by their supposed common ancestry; the belonging to a tribe is defined by "blood," by roots in the same, more or less legendary, past where all individual genealogies ultimately converge. An analogous, albeit not identical, self-definition by participation in a commonly owned past is to be found in religious communities, including the so-called universal religions that are not limited by ethnic bonds. It is not kinship by blood but by a spirit that decides about the belonging, and this kinship is defined historically; by taking part in the same holy history that goes back to the founding events,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when a god, gods, or a god's envoys called to life this spiritual tribe and endowed it with special privileges, imposed specific duties, opened for it access to the saving truth, and entrusted it with a mission.

In both cases of kinship – by blood or spirit – history operates as a binding force whereby a tribe identifies its exclusivity and opposes itself to the entire outside world. People are historical in the sense that they are monopolistic owners of the past in which the world, the tribe or religion were grounded, and they need this past, of course, to give a meaning to their lives and to the universe. Even though this community-founding "historicity" is still alive to some extent both in national consciousness and in religious bonds, it has been inexorably forced out and enfeebled by the victorious march of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and by the transition from tribal life to civil society.

It has been repeatedly pointed out that there was a clear connection between the spread of the rationalist worldview on the ruins of the religious legacy on one side and the formation of civil society (in Rousseau's, not in Hegel's, sense) on the place of tribal kinship on the other. In a civil society individuals gain their affiliation to the social "whole" not by blood and genealogy, but by participation in an abstract legal order. To define and to legitimate this affiliation, one needs no historical considerations. What makes us a society is a power of law, limited in space, and in relation to which individuals are identical. (It took a long time, of course, before the juridic identity of people was finally asserted; as long as legally defined estates and aristocratic privileges remained in power, historical criteria, while weaker and weaker, were still operating.) Briefly, one no longer needs history to validate a social order and the place of an individual in it.

Rationalism in the modern sense, that is rationalism which we connect chiefly with the Cartesian heritage, emerged and won as a belief that the validity of our thinking is defined by criteria that are employed in the procedures of science. Rationalism and civil society –whichever came earlier or was causally active – meet each other in the indifference toward history or in the belief that *history makes nothing valid*; no validity may be accepted, justified or explained by reference to history. It is a naive superstition to imagine that a statement is proved to be true by the fact that it has been believed for a long time, that our ancestors believed in it, that it was revealed as a god's word by a prophet, and so on. To assert the truth of anything, we have at our disposal clear and unconditionally binding mathematical and empirical criteria elaborated by science. Religious truth, too, is valid to the extent that it is made legitimate rationally – "geometrically" or empirically. The history of science itself is hardly relevant to the understanding of science; when the point is to know the truth, for what do we need a long series of insane blunders?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nor are questions of legal order and of the ways of governing decidable by an appeal to tradition; what we ought to think about is which form of government is the most efficient in assuring social peace and better serves human interests. In such issues the theory of social contract and of enlightened egoism provide us with sufficient clues; people care about their private affairs, and the invisible hand of the market produces a reasonably working whole from those uncountable egoisms. Scientific rationalism, the development of the civil society based on juridic equality, the theory of social contract, the actual spread of market economy and its theoretical elaborations – all of these make together a tightly connected block, of which all the components consistently contribute to the disdain for history; any claim that it could serve as a source of legitimacy – either in thinking or in social affairs – is denounced as a remnant of the mythological past.

This worldview, thus crudely and simplistically depicted, formed the ideological kernel of modernity and operated forcefully in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but never without resistance. The reality of ethnic bonds and the continuing vitality of religious tradition could not be quite efficiently driven out by rationalist excommunications. The doctrine according to which the game of egoisms, colliding with each other in a society based on greed, ultimately produces general bliss became highly dubious in light of the effects of the Industrial Revolution, and the early socialists did not fail to call the attention of the European public to this discrepancy between theory and reality. And once the divine authority and the normatively defined natural law – a weakened God or God's modest substitute – had been done away with by rationalist and skeptical strictures, the simple question "How to distinguish good from evil?" became unanswerable, and people were hardly made happier by being told that the question was empty or wrongly phrased.

To be sure, Kant tried to prove that the question could be answered within the framework of a rationalist worldview without appealing to history, and that rules of moral judging could be deduced from the principles of the transcendental rationality in which we all participate. Not many skeptics of the Enlightenment were ready to be convinced by his arguments, though.

The Romantic movement seemed to be an attempt to go back to archaic historicity, to the belief in the legitimizing force of national bonds that had been established in a never-disappearing past. The Catholic temptation seemed understandable in this movement; it was the Roman Church that could boast of its uninterrupted continuity and of being the guardian of the original treasure of Christianity.

Neither liberals nor socialists usually paid much attention to the reality of nations; to most of them it was a remnant of the past epoch,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which the unifying forces of modernity, the progress of the means of communication and of the world market, condemned to disappearance. Their predictions were based on sound arguments, and those people would certainly be astonished if they could see the powerful rebirth of nationalism in our time. But the same impulse that gave energy to the Romantic mind was operating in the socialist movements as well: not in the sense that the socialists praised the glory of the national tradition or the beauty of the idealized spiritual unity of the Middle Ages, but in that they deplored the loss of natural human solidarity in the market economy and the domination of egoism, and dreamed about a society in which a spontaneous and disinterested identification of everyone with humankind would assure eternal harmony. If some remnants of the archaic historicity, that is, the belief in the happy life of primitive, classless tribes, have survived in socialist ideologies, this belief was not supposed to be, of course, a validating principle of the present society but rather an abstract, nonhistorical image of the Golden Age; consequently, it was not properly an example of archaic historicity. And the most powerful theoretical expression of the socialist idea, the Marxian doctrine, originated in an entirely different kind of historicism, which was, of course, associated with the name of Hegel.

The point is not to interpret Hegelian thought or to ask whether or not this reaction to the antihistoricism of the Enlightenment was itself unambiguous and coherent. It seems that two varieties of a new historicity, incompatible with each other, grew out of the Hegelian legacy – no matter whether legitimately or not. The historical man I'm talking about was shaped by one or both of these forms of historicism. And it was Hegel who taught us – directly or indirectly – that we live in history and contribute to its march, that history includes what occurs here and now.

This widespread feeling that we shape history is probably of Hegelian origin; it invaded our language and settled so well in it, with its pathos, that it appears unquestionable. Earlier history was either the chronicle of past events or – in the Augustinian approach – the succession of divine interventions in human affairs. But no longer. I eat breakfast, I have a lecture at the university, I view an exhibition of paintings, I converse with friends; in all those circumstances not only am I surrounded by "history" as a kind of invisible environment, but I contribute to its movement. Sometimes we internalize history as our own life form, sometimes we interact with it in an *intime*, quasi-erotic contact, as if *Historia* were a lady one could seduce. I'm not simply doing this or that – eating breakfast or visiting an exhibition, I am making history.

For what did or do people need this strange and unnatural, philosophically concocted feeling? Once the Enlightenment had sentenced to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

death divine providence, and then God himself, as the source of the meaning of the world, as a tribunal to which one could entrust matters of good and evil, it soon killed Nature as well – God's ersatz that supplied us with both moral rules and principles of rationality. History became a substitute for the substitute – a newly-discovered, reliable foundation on which meaning could be rebuilt; a glue that might again construct the meaningful whole from disconnected pieces and define our place in it.

The *homo historicus* does not need to have historical knowledge or be interested in real history. He knows it as a trustworthy legislator on which one may safely rely, and he believes that it is not simply the mass of "has-been" but a living, immortal entity; "history advances" – like an army; "history will show how right we were" – like a judge; "history will evaluate this event" – like a scholar, and so on.

This was, then, an attempt to devolve on history the obligation to act as the carrier and warden of all human values, to issue verdicts about good and evil, to assume the divine authority, to open to us access to the sources of Higher Reason and of meaning. But further development was to reveal that this attempt was from the outset infected with a fatal ambiguity, as a result of which the new authority not only broke asunder into two irreconcilable tendencies but also had to lead itself to self-defeat and make void the hope for the restitution of meaning.

Both God and Nature were immutable; their judgments on human duties and human dignity, on the meaning of life, on the just and unjust, on the true and false, were supposed to remain immutably valid. History is by definition incapable of issuing such judgments, as it is simply nothing else but change. How then could we trust it and make use of its wisdom?

One of the Hegelian answers is: Only the actual historical process produces the rational and true; nothing else can validate anything. Abstract moral judgments that one applies to this process are empty and powerless. From this some Hegelians drew the conclusion that we ought to accept the actual process *in toto*, as rational and *therefore* praiseworthy, including all its monstrosities. But history, so conceived, provided us with no wisdom and no rules. One cannot use it as a teacher; it requires worship as it is, simply because it is there, like a tyrant. In the best case, we may say: What is today good and rational was yesterday and will perhaps be tomorrow nonsensical and condemnable. This relativistic and ultimately nihilist reading was certainly very simplified, yet not outright false. "Historicism" in this sense could find some good supporting points in the Hegelian construction. Thus elaborated, historical relativism was, of course, much older; it has been prominently present in European cultural history since Montaigne: "Today devilish, yesterday holy"; "Just on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this, unjust on the other side of the Pyrenees." This simple skepticism could not be attributed to Hegel without restrictions, but we read philosophers not as they would like it, but rather as it pleases our time, and it was Hegel who called our attention to that. According to this reading, history is self-sufficient and self-supporting; it has no other ontological background; everything is historically immanent – every truth, every validity, any kind of Reason.

So conceived, the so-called historicism turned inevitably against itself. To say that truth is historically relative, that nothing can be true except with the qualification "in this or that epoch" amounts to saying that there is no truth in the normal sense. Thus we no longer need any history or historicist philosophy; the question about truth is simply done away with. Nietzsche knew that; he also knew that he had drawn all the consequences from God's death, and he wanted to compel us to face the world as it is – without God, and thus without meaning, without good and evil, without truth. For the next hundred years the European mind was to live in the shadow of his nihilism. It is still with us, and it does not need to express itself in the categories of so-called historicism; the universal relativism suffices.

There was another side to the Hegelian heritage, though: the belief in progress and in the consummation of history. The concept of progress, however defined, necessarily implies that we have at our disposal nonhistorical criteria or rules of evaluation, that they do not depend on the actual course of events and that we are entitled, conformably to those criteria, to say: The truth – Truth *tout court* and not a truth tied to an historical period – grows or evolves or manifests itself better and better in history; or to say: The essence of humanity unfolds and matures in time. And the idea of the consummation of history suggests that at a certain point the historical process reaches an absolute form – not in the sense that Miss *Historia* became tired and gave up any further running, but in the sense that she came to plenitude, to the perfect shape.

In spite of his inexorable anti-utopian attitude, Hegel did believe in an ultimate stage of the evolution of mankind. His anti-utopia was directed against all freely concocted images of a perfect society, which people repeatedly attempted to infer from moral principles, irrespective of actual historical process; this criticism was reconcilable with the belief in the fulfillment of history.

The most successful variant of historicism in our century – that is, the Marxian philosophy – has inherited the tension between the belief in the historically limited character of all truths and all ideas on one hand and the anticipation of a final consummation of human calling on the other. On the one side, according to this doctrine, there are no eternal ideas; any creation of culture simply expresses in disguise actual interests of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

various classes. On the other side, we know what makes the essence of being human and what this essence requires for its actualization; only on this condition may we employ words like *alienation, liberation of mankind, the end of alienation,* and the like. Everything is historically determined, but the imminent, ultimate state of humanity – called "the beginning" rather than "the end" of genuine history, to be sure – amounts to the fulfillment of human vocation. Consequently, *not everything* is historically determined.

The Marxian utopia, however, may hardly be described as "historicism" in the proper sense. It certainly included the belief that there are "historical laws" that are soon to bring us a perfect world. The past is unimportant, the task of the anticipated future is to sink it into oblivion. The meaning of the past can be grasped only from the vantage point of the expected *Ultimum*. The future, something that is not given empirically, defines the meaning of the present and of the past. In itself, history is unproductive; it gives no guidance for action and no access to truth, or it does so only in a perverse way, insofar as it takes the meaning from the nonexistent future. And so, history, the last rampart whereby the Enlightenment shielded itself against nihilism – its own creation – and in which people hoped to rediscover the source of meaning, broke under its own weight and was unable to perform its task. The historical man split into two figures, and on both sides history was falling, step by step, into irrelevance.

For those who drew the utopian dreams from Marxian ideology, history was no more than a pretext, supporting their faith in a quasinatural inevitability which would soon give life to their fantasies. Messianic expectations operated as a right to apply any means and any form of violence in order to bring about the millennium. What is, let alone what has been, is unimportant; only the future matters. The nonexistent has more weight – indeed, more being – than what is palpably real. The historical man has gotten rid of history.

Historicism, which conceives of history as an all-encompassing, all-exhausting, self-grounding Absolute, ended up in the denial of history as well. The logic of this peculiar self-emptying seems simple. It has been noted that people held different beliefs in different periods and different civilizations, and historicism was a theoretical extension and elaboration of this old discovery. And this meant that nothing is valid in itself. To say that something is valid for an historical epoch, for a *Zeitgeist* or a civilization, amounts to a matter-of-fact statement that this or that passed for valid or true or obvious in this cultural setting. The adjective "valid" has no special meaning apart from this fact. Therefore, the universal relativism needs no history anymore. The path from historicism in that sense to simple, all-swallowing relativism was straight. In the next phase it was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

announced aloud – in the structuralist ideology – that the knowledge of history in the usual sense (which included an insight into conscious human intentions) is both impossible and useless and, later on, in a further-going discovery, that each meaning we imagine ourselves to have found in the past is our own meaning, imposed by us. No text, for instance, has a meaning in itself (presumably with the exception of the texts of the authors who say precisely that: No text is meaningful in itself); a convenient theory, one may observe, insofar as it liberates us from reading: whatever we read, we in fact read nothing.

And so *homo historicus* has committed suicide to some extent and has been resurrected to some extent, namely as the nihilistic man. And where do we stand now, shortly before the closing of the century, with our uncertainty about history, our discomfort in history, our yearning after history? Have the once historically-grounded, but then history-less, nihilism and relativism that Husserl warned us about early in the century proved irrevocably and ultimately victorious?

The utopian mentality, after so many dreadful disappointments, seems to have declined. There are apparently fewer and fewer people who believe that there is a technique which will lead us infallibly to a paradise where all human needs have been satisfied and all conflicts have disappeared. It is instead doubtless that we will have to employ more and more effort, toil, and money to repair damages we have brought upon ourselves, to ward off ecological calamities and to solve intractable demographic problems; it would be naive to hope that all of us are going to have more and more of everything in the indefinite future. The utopian trust in the benevolent designs of history seems to be waning. But relativism, released from its "historicist" origins, seems to stay in robust health. In its popular, widespread form, it teaches us that we have no unconditional criteria by which to evaluate and confront with one another various civilizations, belief systems or norms, and that whatever makes a part of a civilization is therefore legitimate. Briefly, slavery is as good as freedom; at any rate, neither is "better" in a palpable sense. The more theoretically elaborated relativism of pragmatic persuasion appeals to the concept of consensus and assures us that, as long as we are capable of coming to a consensus, everything is in order and we do not need to bother about anything else.

Since this relativism is clearly associated with the American mentality, it is perhaps not out of place to point out the difference between the American and the German mind. The American mind, for instance, seems to say: "Nobody here defends slavery. It would be indeed extraordinary to find someone who says that there is nothing wrong with slavery, that slavery is just fine and it is a pity that it has been abolished. Thus we may safely state that there is a consensus about the evil of slavery and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing more is needed."

The German mind is not satisfied with this solution. It seems, rather, to say: "Consensus is never enough. I want to know whether or not slavery is in fact evil, and not only what people think about it. Without this knowledge, when one says, 'Slavery is evil,' one says nothing more than that the majority in this or that society believes it is evil. Such an equation is contrary to what people really seek to say and to the meaning they assign to their words; when I say, 'Slavery is evil,' I mean that slavery indeed, in itself, is evil, and not that this is what other people, or most of them, believe. Second, this equation implies that while today slavery might be evil, in the past, when it was believed normal, it was not evil at all. And yet, people who fought against slavery did so because they were convinced it was evil; it ran counter to human dignity; without this belief, slavery would never have been abrogated. Assuming that slavery will be established again and seen as normal, it will in fact be good, as the words 'good and evil' have no other sense." Thus, the German mind wishes to know what is good or evil, real or unreal, true or false. It found its strong expression in the Kantian and Husserlian tradition; it even invaded the Frankfurt School, which never gave up the hope that one might rediscover the *Logos*, free from contingency, that provides us with really binding rules, both for thinking and for issuing value judgments.

The historical man may have wasted away or died off, but his offspring, the carrier of generalized relativism, lives and flourishes. Various characteristics of our time may hypothetically explain his resilience. Only one of them is the all-pervading spirit of popular scientism, which rejects everything that cannot be assessed in terms of visible goods; whereas the distinction between good and evil, not unlike that between true and false in a nonpragmatic sense, seems to be void according to these criteria. The other reason is probably the will to resist the ideological fanaticism, religious or secular, whose antihuman energies we could observe so often in our century. This praiseworthy resistance to fanaticism, however, seems frequently to be a disguise for another attitude: Relativism is convenient insofar as it sanctifies our *indifference*, and it is our indifference to which we would like to give a good name – as if there were no differences between fanaticism and the search for truth, as if nihilism were a reliable barrier against fanaticism.

And so, there are reasons why historical man was born and why he withered away – though not without progeny. In the face of the progressive enfeeblement of religious faith and of confidence in a wise and immutable Nature, our culture set up History as a court of justice, which one may still trust if one prefers not to give in to the pressure of nihilism. And yet his contrivance proved to be weaker than the cultural force

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against which it was supposed to defend us. Historicism was converted into relativist indifference and left us in the same spiritual desert it promised to fertilize.

This desert is comfortable, but it is heavy to live in. People have always needed the belief that the world can be not only dominated but made intelligible as well; this need, we may presume, makes a component of their being human. Therefore, we notice now, in our brutal century, various attempts to rediscover a way that might perhaps lead us to the lost meaning. It is improbable that traditional historicism will open this route and persuade us again to trust history as it actually is. One observes, rather, a new yearning for the archaic historicity. In defiance of all rational expectations, the need to find oneself again in the tribal belonging, to define oneself by national culture, seems stronger and not weaker. There is no need to stress all the dangers that this quite understandable need brings about when it degenerates into bellicose chauvinism. Above all – again in defiance of rational expectations – the quest for religious self-identification is coming back to life. It is not inconceivable that, once the profane history has been dismissed as the ground of meaning, people will rediscover the archaic religious roots as a means, more reliable than any other, of coping with their disarray and uncertainty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV

Stalin's Death

Until recently, Stalin's death was shrouded in mystery. His heir Khrushchev, and later, his daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva, found him already unconscious, in agony, a few hours before his death. Finally, we know how he died. His guards, still defending their master, dead for thirty-five years, have compiled collective memoirs that, regardless of their authors' political sympathies, are of tremendous historic value.

Several days before his death, on February 28, 1953, Stalin invited Beria, Malenkov, Bulganin, and Khrushchev to the Kremlin for a film screening. It was his last meeting with his closest circle, and it is this fact, together with his son Vasily drunkenly yelling, "They killed my father," that served as the basis for the theory that Stalin was killed by his allies – one that is steadily receiving more currency in the Soviet Union. This would have been a triumph of historical justice, however belated. As Thomas Jefferson put it, "The tree of freedom must from time to time be nourished by the blood of patriots and tyrants." Alas, throughout thirty years of Stalin's tyranny – at least until late February of 1953 – no one had ever tried to assassinate him, whereas he himself murdered millions of imaginary enemies and conspirators. Could the art of a successful autocracy be exactly that: beating your potential enemies to a punch and revealing conspiracies before they emerge?

Kremlin film screenings, as well as the feasts that followed them, were routine events whose guest lists indicated Stalin's favor or disfavor to his cohorts. In the preceding period, he had stopped inviting Molotov, who did not have a disloyal bone in his body, and who easily reconciled himself to his wife's arrest for her links to Zionists (she attended the reception hosted by Golda Meir, the ambassador of the newborn State of Israel). Even after Stalin's death, Molotov protested Khrushchev's exposures; for that he was expelled from the Party, to be reinstalled shortly before his death. He died in 1986 at the age of 96, a convinced and principled Stalinist whose fervor did not diminish after his thirty years of serving the despot. Meanwhile, Stalin suspected him of being "an agent of U. S. imperialism" solely on the basis of a rumor that, while in the United States, Molotov rode home from Washington to New York in a personal railroad car. How could he afford to do that? He must have sold out to the Americans. Stalin sent a telegram with an inquiry to Vyshinsky, the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations. Vyshinsky instantly responded that American railroads are privately

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

owned, that Molotov never had an individual car – and that nobody in America did things like that in the first place. Nonetheless, Stalin stopped inviting Molotov to screenings; as Khrushchev put it, Molotov was "suspended." In addition, he was married to "an agent of world Zionism." His fate was sealed, like the fate of two other Politburo members, Mikoyan and Voroshilov. They, too, were no longer invited, since Stalin thought them to be British spies. When Khrushchev narrates Stalin's suspicions, he explains that his purpose is to explain "the situation, the delusions that Stalin had in the final stage of his life." If only this referred to the final stage alone. . . .

When the screening was over, all five – Stalin, Beria, Malenkov, Bulganin, and Khrushchev – went to the "Close Dacha," the one in Kuntzevo that was closer to Moscow than Stalin's other dachas. According to Khrushchev, the dinner stretched until five in the morning; according to the staff, Stalin was alone by four. Khrushchev's last memory was of Stalin walking his guests to the lobby and playfully jabbing Khrushchev in the stomach. He called Khrushchev "Mikita," which was a good sign. "When he was favorably disposed, he always called me 'Mikita,' the Ukrainian version of Nikita."

After the guests were gone, Stalin surprised his guards. "I'm going to bed," he said. "I won't need you. You go to bed, too."

He had never given such orders before.

At noon on March 1st, the guards noted the absence of any movement in Stalin's study and rooms. That made them wary, but at about 6:30 p.m., the lights went on in the study and in the hall. They sighed relief, expecting that Stalin would summon someone. But nothing happened. It was quickly getting dark. Seven, eight, nine, ten o'clock. Now the guards were worried: Stalin's daily routine was clearly being disrupted. It did not matter that it was Sunday: his weekend routine was the same as on weekdays. By ten thirty, they became suspicious: something was wrong.

P. Lozgachev, the Dacha Deputy Commander, writes: "Starostin, who was my commanding officer, kept insisting that I should go see Stalin. You're my superior, I told him; you go. So we kept arguing, passing the buck.

"Finally the mail arrived, giving us a pretext to go see him. I picked up the letters, and confidently went in to report. I passed through a couple of rooms, but Stalin was nowhere to be seen. Finally I looked inside the smaller dining room. The sight was horrible. I froze completely; my limbs would not obey me. Stalin was lying on the rug, next to the table, leaning on his arm in an odd manner. He was still conscious, but he could not talk: he had lost his speech ability. Yet he must have heard my footsteps, and seemed to be calling me with his faintly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

raised hand. I ran up to him: 'What's wrong, Comrade Stalin?' In response, I heard an incoherent sound, something like 'zzz.' On the floor lay a pocket watch, and a copy of *Pravda*; on the table, I saw a bottle of mineral water and a glass.

"I urgently called Starostin, Tukov, and Butusova on the intercom. They came right away. One of us asked, 'Would you like us to help you to the couch, Comrade Stalin?' He nodded weakly. Together, we moved him to the couch in the dining room. We immediately called Ignatov at the KGB, but he was too chicken-hearted and referred us to Beria. We had to move our patient to the large hall. We did that together, too, and then laid him down on the sofa and covered him with a blanket. He looked as if he was suffering from cold; he must have been lying there, helpless, since seven or eight p.m. I remained on duty at his bedside."

M. Starostin, Special Assignments, recounts: "I called Malenkov up, right away, to tell him that Comrade Stalin was sick. After about half an hour, Malenkov called back. 'I can't find Beria. You'll have to find him yourself.' Another half-hour passed. Beria called: 'Don't tell anybody of Stalin's illness, and don't call anybody.' "

P. Lozgachev states, "I sat at Stalin's bedside by myself, feeling completely depressed by my helplessness. Starostin kept running around, bugging me to call the bosses. Who was I supposed to call? Everybody who needed to know already knew. That night was so hard on me; it seemed endless. By morning my temples turned gray. I stayed on, alone.

"Two a.m.: still no doctors. At three a.m., March 2nd, I heard a car coming. I felt better, thinking, 'Finally the physicians have arrived, and I can hand Stalin over to them.' But I was wrong: it was Beria and Malenkov.

"Beria marched forth, without paying attention to anybody. Malenkov's shoes were creaking; he took them off, and entered wearing socks, with his shoes under his arm. The comrades stopped some distance away from the patient, and silently stood there for a while. Suddenly, Stalin snored loudly. 'What are you panicking about?' Beria said to me. 'Don't you see that Comrade Stalin is sound asleep? Calm down, don't bug us, and don't bug Comrade Stalin either.'

"I tried to tell him that Comrade Stalin was seriously sick and required emergency medical care. But the comrades would not listen and departed in haste. Beria cursed at Starostin. His only printable words were, 'Who the hell put you morons to work for Stalin?' And so Malenkov and Beria left."

No one in Stalin's closest circle wanted him to pull through. Each wished him dead. Was it fear? Paranoia? Or was it merely the sober judgment of the situation? Simple survival instinct?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Beria, Stalin found his match. Beria was slyer and shrewder, compared not only to his predecessors but to Stalin as well. All Stalin's guards had been selected by Beria. After Stalin's death, it was discovered that his Kremlin apartment and his dachas were bugged, that his conversations had been taped, and that all the recordings had been sent to Beria on a daily basis. Stalin might have suspected this but could hardly have been sure. Beria, though, was aware of every word Stalin uttered. Stalin found himself in a trap that he, assisted by Beria and his ilk, had laid out for his enemies, both real and imaginary.

Under *glasnost*, the Soviet media has been filled with rumors that Stalin was ultimately assassinated by Beria. Whether this is true or not, only Beria had a real chance of learning of Stalin's plot against him and of preempting it. And it cannot be denied that at that point the Kremlin was too small for both of them. The tyrant could be murdered, or have his death speeded up, only by a nascent tyrant like himself.

Lozgachev recounts that the doctors arrived between half-past nine and ten, that is, only the next day: ten hours after the guards had found Stalin lying on the floor, "The clock struck four, five, six, seven a.m. Still no medical assistance. It was looking like treason. Khrushchev arrived at 7:30 and said that the doctors from the Kremlin hospital were on the way."

Svetlana Alliluyeva, who was summoned later, recalls that none of the doctors were familiar. It was the first time that they had seen the patient, which was understandable: all the Kremlin physicians were in jail by then. No wonder the newly arrived doctors treated their august patient with a mystical awe.

Khrushchev remembers: "Well, we told the doctors to get going and find out Stalin's condition. Professor Lukomskoy approached Stalin warily. I could understand that. You know, he would touch Stalin's hand as if it were a hot iron, shaking a bit. Beria said gruffly, 'Are you a doctor, or what? He's a patient, take his hand.' "

Lozgachev: "The physicians were extremely nervous. Their hands were shaking so badly, they could not take the shirt off their patient, so it had to be cut off with scissors. Once they had a look, they diagnosed a blood hemorrhage. They started him on treatment: a camphor shot, leaches, oxygen. Surgical treatment was out of the question. What surgeon would shoulder such responsibility, with Beria posing questions like, 'Do you guarantee Comrade Stalin will live?' "

By then the whole country, through government and medical releases, knew that Stalin was sick. Well-meaning doctors kept calling the dacha: they begged to be let in and assured that they would cure Comrade Stalin. Some calls came even from abroad. A guard named Tukov tells of a caller so persistent that eventually Beria grabbed the phone and,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without any preliminaries, barked, "What the hell do you want? Is this some kind of setup?" The caller must have realized whom he was dealing with and hung up immediately.

The only people in the country who were ignorant of Stalin's condition were his Kremlin doctors, thrown in jail at his orders. Yakov Rapoport tells of having been summoned to his investigator's room – for a consultation rather than for questioning. "What is Cheyne-Stokes respiration? When does it occur? How does one eliminate it? If it has been diagnosed, can the patient get better?"

The entire Soviet people, young and old, already knew what Cheyne-Stokes (also known as "tidal") respiration was, due to the medical releases on Comrade Stalin's condition. Dr Rapoport, not even suspecting the patient's identity, diligently explained the causes and effects of Cheyne-Stokes respiration to his investigator. The latter wrote down the answers, completely unruffled, and asked at the end if Rapoport could recommend any prominent specialists for treating this serious condition. Rapoport answered that he did not know which of the high-ranking specialists were still not jailed, putting the investigator on the spot: under no circumstances was the inmate to know what was going on outside.

After a pause, the investigator repeated the question.

"Vinogradov is an excellent doctor," Rapoport said, "but you are holding him. Vovsi is splendid also, but you are holding him, too. Ettinger is a very good diagnostician, but, again, you have him. Both Kogans are good, but one died in jail, and you have the other one. If you need a neurologist, then Greenstein is the best clinical neurologist around, but – you have him, too. For ear-nose-throat, I'd recommend Preobrazhensky or Feldman – you've got them both."

Later it turned out that other arrested doctors were consulted as well – that is, those still able to do so after torture.

Meanwhile, in Kuntzevo the situation was drawing to an end. Besides Svetlana, they summoned Stalin's son Vasily as well. He brought some flying charts with him, fearing his father would again test his proficiency – he had been made a two-star Air Force general by then. As usual, he was tipsy, and when he learned that Stalin had had to wait for half a day for medical assistance and that no surgery had been performed, he started yelling, "You murdered my father, you bastards!"

The Politburo members were keeping vigil at Stalin's bedside in pairs. Khrushchev's partner was Bulganin, and Khrushchev recalls how they discussed the cabinet shuffle there would be after Stalin's death. When Malenkov and Beria's turn came, they must have discussed the same subject. Just as Stalin had feared his allies' intrigue and worked to beat them to the punch, now they were plotting against one another,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too, forming coalitions and mapping out strategies. They no longer feared Stalin; they feared one another. They had been carrying the Kremlin virus of paranoia for a long time, and Stalin's death would not rid them of it – they would carry it with them to their graves.

They were too impatient to wait for Stalin's death and seized power before he let off the ghost. They even found the time, while Stalin was in the throes of agony, to call a joint Kremlin meeting of the Central Committee, the Council of Ministers, and the Supreme Soviet, and declare the redistribution of the positions previously occupied by Stalin alone. Writer Konstantin Simonov, who was present at the meeting, recalls that Stalin's "comrades" did not even bother to conceal their relief: "They seemed a bit like babies freed of their diapers."

Having announced their ascent to power, they hurried back to the tyrant's deathbed. Beria was more restless and nervous than the others. Svetlana Alliluyeva found his demeanor indecent: he was excited to the extreme, and his face was from time to time distorted by his passions seeking an outlet. "What were his passions? Ambition, cruelty, shrewdness, and power, power, power . . . At that decisive moment, he was trying so hard to steer the right course – not too obviously crooked, but crooked just the same! It was in his face, as he approached the bed and stared at the patient's face. Occasionally, Father would open his eyes, but he must have been unconscious, or barely unconscious. Beria's look seized these befogged eyes: to the last moment, he sought to be 'the most loyal, the most dedicated.' "

Khrushchev gives a better-rounded description of Beria's behavior at Stalin's deathbed (but then his whole memoir is more intelligent than Alliluyeva's): "The moment Stalin fell sick, Beria became filled with rage against him. He cursed and mocked him. I couldn't bear to listen to him.

"The moment Stalin showed signs of consciousness, making it clear that he would get up and get better, we started shaking his hand. Beria rushed to Stalin's side, grabbed his hand, and covered it with kisses. When Stalin lost consciousness again, Beria got up and spat at him. This was pure Beria. Treacherous even towards Stalin, whom he seemed to worship – and spat at the next moment."

Khrushchev also noticed that when the doctors were taking a urine sample, Stalin tried to cover himself, showing unease, "He seemed to show signs of being alert."

There is no sworn testimony; there are only witnesses, whose recollections of the same event may diverge considerably. Stalin went through horrible agony, especially in his final hours, when his complexion turned dark, his lips grew black, his features changed beyond recognition. He was suffocating slowly – all the symptoms of Cheyne-Stokes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

syndrome, caused by a massive brain hemorrhage. And then, according to his daughter, at one point, almost at the last moment, he suddenly opened his eyes and slowly looked over the crowd at his deathbed, one by one.

"It was a horrifying look, " Alliluyeva writes, "whether it was filled with madness or with horror at death and the strange faces of the doctors who leaned over him. And then – it was both inexplicable and horrifying, I still don't know which, but I'll never forget it – then he raised his left hand, which he could still move, and either pointed vaguely upwards, or threatened all of us. The gesture was incomprehensible but menacing, and I don't know whom or what it was in reference to. The next moment, his soul, with a final effort, broke free of his body."

Here is how Khrushchev describes the same scene: "Once during the day, I don't remember exactly when, Stalin seemed to regain consciousness. I could tell from his expression, although he could not talk. He raised his left hand and pointed either to the wall or to the ceiling. A sort of smile showed on his lips . . . you know what he was pointing at? There was a picture on the wall, a reproduction of a painting clipped out of the *Ogonyok* magazine. In the picture, a little girl was feeding a lamb out of a horn. At that time Stalin was being spoon-fed, and he must have been pointing at the picture and trying to smile: Look, I'm just like that little lamb. . . ."

Khrushchev's description is probably more trustworthy. Alliluyeva chose the standard way of describing a tyrant's death, used in literature since time immemorial, from Russian medieval chronicles to Shakespeare's historical dramas. Stalin's future denouncer treated the dying tyrant as a human being and explained his last gesture in human terms.

Not one of Stalin's allies came to his help or called for a doctor. And when the doctors came, it was too late.

Translated from the Russian by David Gurevich

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PEARL K. BELL

Fiction Chronicle

Publishing has always been a tense and risky mix of commerce, intellectual vocation, and gamesmanship. But these days it is the business component that seems to be eclipsing the others. A recent story about a new imprint at Random House, called Turtle Bay Books, appeared not in *The New York Times Book Review* but in the business section of *The Sunday New York Times*, and it was clear that business was the overriding concern of the women running this show. In pursuit of "big bucks," the *Times* reported, Turtle Bay is nursing such projects as biographies of Robert Mapplethorpe and Stanford White, a portrait of Henry Miller by Erica Jong, and novels by "a follower of Andy Warhol" and the English writer A. S. Byatt, whose assiduously learned romance, *Possession*,[1] has been the astonishment of the season, a scholarly *tour de force* that against all expectations became a best-seller and was sold to the movies for about half a million dollars.

Most of the novels that received serious critical attention in the past year could be said to cross the two extremes of jokey postmodern antics in the spirit of Andy Warhol and the learned literary plenitude of A. S. Byatt. Though it's always difficult to identify specific trends in contemporary fiction – the novel, protean as it is, encompasses an enormous diversity of sensibility and talent – it is intriguing to note the virtual disappearance of minimalism, which only a few years ago held an entire generation of young writers in thrall. These days, fullness is all, a far cry from the stuttering discontinuities of Mary Robison, Amy Hempel, Barry Hannah, and the like.

Maximal is the word for *Possession*, the most unconfined and copious celebration of the literary life as we are likely to encounter for many years. It is many other things as well: a love story embracing both past and present, an academic detective story, an epistolary novel that cunningly imitates (not parodies) the loquacious propriety and circumlocutory detachment of learned Victorian correspondents, and a staggering feat of literary ventriloquism. As though this were not enough, it is also a spirited attack on Lacanian feminism and theory-besotted deconstructionist notions about the non-meaning of language ("He had been taught that language was essentially inadequate, that it could never speak

[1] *Possession*. By A. S. Byatt. Random House. $22.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what was there, that it only spoke itself"), with a few quivers hurled at American collectors of literary memorabilia. Byatt, a former don at the University of London who has published studies of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Iris Murdoch, as well as four earlier, and one must say duller, novels, is passionately in love with language and Victorian poetry, and she has drawn from her overflowing well of erudition with indefatigable glee.

Roland Mitchell, a wimpy young scholar with dismal prospects, stumbles on the draft of a letter that the revered Victorian poet Randolph Ash (modeled on Browning) wrote to the poet Christabel LaMotte (part Emily Dickinson, part Christina Rossetti, with a dollop of Browning's wife). Long forgotten, LaMotte has been rediscovered and apotheosized in our time by an American feminist, Professor Leonora Stern of Tallahassee University, and the British academic Maud Bailey, beautiful, repressed, and incurably cerebral, much given to such donnish reflections as "Do you ever have the sense that our metaphors *eat up* our world?"

When Roland and Maud discover a cache of letters LaMotte had hidden in a doll's bed, they embark on a feverish quest to uncover what really happened between the long-dead poets. Soon they are hotly pursued in the race for the secret truth by the implacable Professor Stern, who feels that LaMotte is her property and the others should get out of the way. Faced with this formidable American competitor, Maud becomes practical: "We'd better start looking for the facts as well as images," she tells Roland. In the end, of course, the facts are not really surprising – Byatt has been slyly hinting and whispering and alluding all along – but it is poetic images, Everests of images – that fill much of the space in this very long novel. Since Byatt can leave nothing unexamined or merely suggested, a writer who must spell out her intentions with fiercely pointed elaborateness, toward the end of the story she unhappily becomes the didactic lecturer. Gripping the lectern, she speaks directly to the reader: "It is possible for a writer to make, or remake at least for a reader, the primary pleasures of eating, drinking, or looking on, or sex. . . . They do not habitually elaborate on the equally intense pleasure of reading. . . . There are readings – of the same text – that are dutiful, readings that map and dissect. . . ."

Dutiful. The word is sharply relevant to the often exhausting experience of reading *Possession.* Other novelists might be willing to make do with an illustrative excerpt from the work of an invented poet, and lazily leave it at that. Not Byatt, the great impersonator, who brilliantly simulates the voice, tone, mood, metaphor – everything but the genius – of her eminent Victorians with uncanny skill and has the inexhaustible energy of a Victorian as well. (Were there more hours in the Victorian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

day than in ours, or did they just have more servants?) As the dusty veils of secrecy gradually lift away from the illicit love affair of Ash and LaMotte – he supposedly content in his marriage, she proudly single and independent – we are given not only all of the impassioned letters the two exchanged, containing long accounts of their work in progress, but the entire texts of epics, dramatic monologues, tales for children, short Dickinsonesque lyrics, not to mention entries in various thick diaries, plus the by no means brief journal kept by Christabel's niece, who reveals that a child was born of the poets' clandestine week in Yorkshire. It is all of a frenzied, extravagant prodigality of words, words, words that tries the patience – and arouses the temptation to skip – of the most conscientious reader. As my eyes glazed amid Ash's epic "Swammerdam" and LaMotte's mythical fantasy "Melusine," I could not always suppress that temptation.

Why has Byatt loaded the circuits of *Possession* with such intemperate overabundance? Why did she feel it necessary time and again to interrupt a charming story of quest and passion with so many numbing pages of dull Victorian verse written by herself? (Browning was not dull; neither was Emily Dickinson.) Part of the problem is an obsessively literary novelist's zeal to show what she can do, to strut her stuff with exhibitionistic panache. But even more important may be the modish refusal of a present-day novelist to tell a story straight. The postmodern infatuation with pastiche, the high-vaulting dazzle of ingenuity – these are the rules of the game today, and Byatt can play it superbly. But she is so truly *possessed* by her need to celebrate and demonstrate "the power and delight of words" that the immediate human music of this romance is all but drowned out by the verbal thunder. When Byatt now and then manages to control her cleverness, she casts fresh light on love and desire in Victoria's day compared with our own. It is her "postmodern" scholars who are the priggish and frightened "children of a time that mistrusted love," and the supposedly repressed Victorians who are not afraid of the risk or their passion. But this intriguing reversal of received ideas is soon overwhelmed by her deluge of words.

If Byatt's sobriety and learning form one end of the literary spectrum, Ted Mooney's flashy, jazzy *Traffic and Laughter*[2] belongs at the opposite extreme. The novel begins and ends with devastating fires, and in between the conflagrations it alights on a dizzying variety of matters and places: international diplomacy, sex, South African apartheid, disc jockeys, sex, rock bands, sex, Los Angeles, more sex, and everything in the

[2] *Traffic and Laughter.* By Ted Mooney. Alfred A. Knopf. $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kitchen sink.

The time is the present, but reality and history as we know them have been artfully skewed: the "fission bomb," as Mooney calls it, has just been perfected, and high-level diplomats are conferring secretly in France about a test ban for this lethally hot property. In the course of these "simple" negotiations some of the diplomats hope to abolish racial oppression in Africa and bring peace to the world as well. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, the popular disc jockey Sylvia Walters (symbolic relative of Barbara? Mooney is fond of such allusive twinings), daughter of the American diplomat at the negotiating table, is trying to save what she can from her house, which is about to be consumed by the brush fires devastating the canyon. However, she also interrupts her packing long enough for some torrid sex with a special-effects expert she barely knows. Cut to the city center (if Los Angeles *has* a center), where Sylvia meets a black actress from South Africa whose diplomat father is also involved in the bomb conference, and who draws Sylvia into a scheme for smuggling arms to the rebels in her country.

The cinematic action, occasionally written in scenario form, whirls from Los Angeles to Paris to Johannesburg to Cape Town, Mooney nudging us along with a wagging finger of significance about the sinister, undefinable, malevolent forces controlling the fate of everyone in this unreal-but-familiar world. Since both history and culture seem to consist mainly, for this thirty-nine-year-old novelist, of interchangeable facts and notions, Mooney doesn't hesitate to revise as he pleases: the main airport of Paris is called "Henri Pétain"; the Second World War ended with a bloody invasion of Japan by American forces; James Joyce wrote a sequel to *Finnegans Wake* called *A Simple Tail*; and *Dr. Strangelove* is a forgotten documentary made by a mystery man who may or may not be an agent of the C.I.A. The "jokes" proliferate, but the comedy falters as the collage of ambiguous scenes becomes more tangled and confusing.

There is more than a pinch of Pynchon paranoia as the action races to its fiery finale. But for all the games he loves to play with history, Mooney doesn't have Pynchon's manic, inventive vitality. Though he struggles to convey some profound insight into our perilous times, it consists only of such throwaway obfuscation as, "A woman laughing is the sound of history." Both intellectually and emotionally, *Traffic and Laughter* is too meretricious to be taken seriously. The plot is a maze without an exit, and the characters have the depth of a movie poster. To echo the immortal words of Ben Hecht, this novel is as phony as a glass eye. As for the mystifying title, Mooney, when prodded by an interviewer, refused to divulge what it means, only that "It's much too personal." That's one way of saying that the title, like the novel itself, means less than meets the glass eye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of course there's nothing mysterious about the title of T. Coraghessan Boyle's new novel, *East Is East*.[3] Kipling's phrase provides an ironic counterpoint to the fate of Hiro, a young seaman from Japan. The son of a Japanese bar maid and an American hippie who vanished from Kyoto before the child was born, Hiro, brought up by his grandmother, has been a lifelong victim, tormented by his xenophobic schoolmates as "a half-breed, a *happa*, a high-nose and butter-stinker – and an orphan to boot – forever a foreigner in his own society." On the Japanese freighter where he is an assistant cook, Hiro's life is humiliating, though his sense of worthlessness is somewhat alleviated by the stern code of honor he has discovered in the work of a seventeenth-century samurai and his twentieth-century disciple, Yukio Mishima. Taunted beyond endurance by his crewmates, Hiro literally jumps ship off the coast of Georgia and swims to Tupelo Island, which is inhabited by both rednecks and senile old ladies who think he is Seiji Ozawa, and where he is befriended for a few days by an ambitious and untalented writer, Ruth Dershowitz, a member of the artists' colony on the island. (Why Boyle appropriated the name of the talented Harvard law professor for this mediocre lady is hard to fathom.)

Hiro dreams of finding his father and losing the stigma of a half-breed: ". . . the Americans, he knew, were a polyglot tribe, mutts and mulattoes and worse – or better, depending on your point of view. In America you could be one part Serbo-Croatian and three parts Eskimo and walk down the street with your head held high." Most of the time, alas, Hiro, starving and hunted like a mad dog by the rednecks and two demented immigration officials, hides out in the swamp near the colony, where Boyle has a high old time describing the insects and brambles that tear the pathetic fugitive to ribbons. When he is finally captured, Hiro's only recourse is to repeat the *seppu-ku* fate of his samurai-guru, Mishima.

Like a juggler, Boyle keeps several narratives and comic intentions spinning without a miss. There is a fierce versatility to his imagination, and a verbal ingenuity – no minimalist he – that does not entirely avoid self-indulgence when he pulls the throttle of his language all the way out. You can hear him clearing his throat as he launches into a swelling, seething cadenza, with its resonant echoes of Joyce and Melville, about the great Okefenokee swamp:

> Vast and primeval, unfathomable, unconquerable, bastion of cottonmouth, rattlesnake and leech, mother of vegetation, father of

[3] *East Is East*. By T. Coraghessan Boyle. Viking. $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> mosquito, soul of silt, the Okefenokee is the swamp archetypal, the swamp of legend, of racial memory, of Hollywood . . . Four hundred and thirty acres of stinging, biting, and boring insects, of maiden cane and gum and cypress, of palmetto, slash pine and peat, of muck, mud, slime and ooze. Things fester here, things cook down, decompose, deliquesce. . . .

And so on, and on, in a roaring, deafening cascade of facts, names, creaturely customs, statistics, nature lore, for the next five paragraphs.

If Ted Mooney likes to get things wrong, Boyle is fanatically fond of getting things right. Two of his previous novels – *Water Music*, about the real-life eighteenth-century explorer Mungo Park, and *World's End*, which traces the history of three Dutch and Indian families in the Hudson River Valley over three hundred years – were anchored in substantial research. Boyle has also done his homework for *East Is East*, with its suave command of Japanese words and habits, the flora and fauna of Georgia, rare species of fish, and the contentious sniping of literary rivals in the artists' colony.

Yet some aspects of *East Is East* are disturbing. His satirical send-up of literary infighting is obvious and predictable. The uninspired and silly Ruth Dershowitz is subjected to more humiliation than she deserves. When a writer named Mignonette Teitelbaum arrives on the scene, we can't help remembering that S. J. Perelman did this sort of thing much better. More seriously, though Boyle's feelings about Hiro oscillate between laughter and pity, it is the comedy of the poor wretch's ordeal that engages him most fervently. Boyle is indeed a virtuoso of exuberant prose and a very clever fellow, but the stench of *Schadenfreude* inevitably tempers – or curdles – our admiration for an exuberant talent who needs a more fruitful subject than comic victims and literary fools.

Stanley Elkin has written some wonderfully funny novels – *The Dick Gibson Show*, *The Living End*, and *The Franchiser*, among others – in which he miraculously transformed the most unlikely dross into comic gold. He fitted God with contact lenses and unearthed a yeshiva in the Maldive Islands. Against all odds, teetering on the edge of the unforgivable, Elkin wrote a nutty, hilarious novel, *The Magic Kingdom*, about an excursion to Disney World by an unruly bunch of terminally sick children. Elkin has consistently thumbed his nose at the tiresome pedantry of critics who have complained about his indifference to coherent narrative structure and his stubborn refusal to tell a straightforward story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His new novel, *The MacGuffin*,[4] as he explained to an interviewer, is his eccentric way of flouting this longstanding reproach. "That's why I was so careful to put all of the structure in *The MacGuffin* – to show them, 'Look! I can do structure.' " Yet it perhaps comes as no surprise to find that Elkin's idea of narrative structure is more than mildly idiosyncratic. The title borrows the term Alfred Hitchcock used for a device, of no importance in itself, that gets a story moving. But exactly how Elkin defines a MacGuffin for his purposes is hard to comprehend, since the book is long on elaborately wrought self-scrutiny by the melancholy protagonist, Robert Druff, and largely without what one can reasonably call a plot.

In all his work, Elkin has been drunk with language, and we must track this story through the dense thicket of his winding and sinuous sentences and paragraphs bulging with lengthy parentheses. But we can never be sure what is happening – if anything *is* actually happening outside his character's fantasies. As we struggle through Elkin's irrepressible and acrobatic contortions of language, only gradually can we more or less begin to guess what the book is about.

The story: At fifty-eight, Robert (Bobbo) Druff, the Commissioner of Streets in a nondescript middle-sized American city, feels ready to pack it in. He's constipated, has had lung and heart surgery, is erratically impotent, and is sure he's afflicted with "the beginnings of senility." His soul, like his body, is exhausted; he feels threatened by his political enemies, and his dimwitted son is driving him crazy. All told, Druff knows he's on "the downhill of destiny," his life in dangerous disarray.

Enter the MacGuffin, which Elkin seems to envision as a variety of whimsical urges and impulses, and which Druff variously identifies as "the spirit of narrative in his life (sort of)," or "these sort of guardian angels . . . tests from God. Little blessings blown on not-quite-good-or-interesting-enough lives," or the revival of his ability to survive with some semblance of hope and good will. The MacGuffin, we can dimly begin to perceive, is everything that forces Druff to confront his drab self, find a way out of the slough of despondency, and face up to the future. As Druff is stirred by this imp of tricks, illusions, and a skewed form of hope, he picks up a tough-talking sportswear buyer and has a few reassuring hours in her bed. The next morning he wanders through the streets that he oversees as Commissioner in his "rather backwater city" and gnaws at an unsolved mystery that keeps turning up like a lost penny throughout the novel. Some months earlier his son's girlfriend, Su'ad, a devout Shiite Muslim enrolled at the local university, was killed by a hit-and-run driver. But we never do find out who killed her, or why Druff is obsessed by

[4] *The MacGuffin*. By Stanley Elkin. Linden Press. $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her death. When, in the midst of his endless dialogues with himself and his MacGuffin, Druff announces that "everything was linked, everything. Everything inevitable and conjoined in the vast, limitless network of things, merged in the world's absolute ecology," this epiphany seems unearned and implausible. Druff is less a convincingly troubled human being than a jumble of tics, *kvetches*, longings and lusts, wasted opportunities, and too many tedious asides of self-justification and self-reproach. Among other things the MacGuffin is an inner voice of paranoid dread – hence the connection with "plot." (We've come a long way from Hitchcock.)

In the past Elkin rarely missed his comic targets. With all his outrageously ornate and corkscrewed prose, he has been one of the most inventively funny writers in America, an original whose books were buoyant with comic surprise. But there's not much comedy in *The MacGuffin*. In this baggy assemblage of wiseacre idiom, cliché, equivocation and incoherence, the "spirit of narrative" that supposedly provides the novel's structure collapses under the oppressive weight of Elkin's arched and buttressed obfuscations, his giddy addiction to catalogues, inventories, lists, puns. Druff is too dreary to arouse our laughter, and the MacGuffin device is too snarled in obscurity to be funny. We will forgive a writer just about anything – if he will only make us laugh.

Sometime back, in a lecture on "the future of the novel," Elkin remarked that "the reasonable and recognizable *is* where it's at." When "the recognizable" informs the work of an uncommonly perceptive and lyrical writer like Michael Cunningham, the ordinary can acquire the luster of transcendence without sacrificing the veracity of the commonplace. This is one of the rarest and most valuable of literary gifts. While the postmodern fascination with pastiche and parody is state-of-the-art for flashy writers, the compassionate intelligence that Cunningham brings to his first novel, *A Home at the End of the World*,[5] is a far more affecting way to confront the vagaries and sorrows of contemporary experience.

Despite his title, Cunningham does not attempt to draw apocalyptic implications from such experience, and he is certainly not invoking the specter of atomic conflagration that closes Mooney's *Traffic and Laughter*. Rather, he is talking about death and the vulnerability of expectations in the plague years of AIDS (though the word itself is not mentioned). And he is also exploring the way the absolutes of family and home can splinter and break, and then re-form in new, not necessarily better, configurations of hope and uncertainty.

---

[5] *A Home at the End of the World*. By Michael Cunningham. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $18.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The book is told in a chain of voices as we follow the lives of two unhappy Midwestern families. At thirteen, Jonathan frets and tugs at the stifling strings that have bound him dangerously close to his discontented mother, while his schoolfriend Bobby is oppressed by irrational guilt about the accidental death of his beloved older brother. Seeking a refuge from their teenage *angst*, the two boys construct a cocoon of marijuana, rock music, and sexual fumbling, from which Jonathan's mother is pointedly excluded. Eventually Jonathan, grown and gay, finds a home of sorts in New York, where he shares an apartment with the raffish Clare, the most vividly realized of Cunningham's characters.

One of nature's bohemians, and worse, Clare has been a lifelong rebel against her parents' bourgeois rectitude. At the age of thirty-six, Jonathan tells us, she:

> had already gotten through a marriage, an abortion, dozens of lovers, and three changes of career. . . . Clare's rival was her own image, the elaborate personality she'd worked out for herself. She lived at a shifting, troubled distance from her ability to be tough and salty and "interesting." . . . She'd been the lover of a semi-famous woman author. She'd taken heroin and opium and enough Dexedrine to require treatment at a clinic. . . . My own life, compared to hers, seemed timid and cautious.

As we see her at first, Clare is a quintessential creature of the sixties, reckless and anarchic, yet her transformation in the course of the story is portrayed with a delicately sympathetic understanding of the biological desperation that finally allows her to break the leash of self-destruction. When Bobby comes East from Cleveland, he becomes Clare's lover, and the three move to a ramshackle house in Woodstock where they hope to live as a "new kind of family." But life and death intervene with their irreconcilable imperatives; they are the poles of Cunningham's concern with his characters' confusions of certainty.

When Clare's daughter by Bobby is born, she is astonished to find that mothers "become monsters of care, inexorable, and if we occasionally lose track of the finer, imperishable points of the soul while ministering to the fragile body, that can't be helped." Motherhood has liberated Clare from her pathological obsession with the worst of herself. While Clare becomes a tiger fiercely protective of her child, Jonathan's lover, Erich, comes to the Woodstock house to die of AIDS. As Jonathan awaits the inevitable consequences of too many promiscuous couplings with "a full platoon of strangers," he broods about the lethally mindless illusions of sexual freedom: "We'd thought we lived at the beginning of an orgiastic new age, in which men and women could answer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without hesitation to harmless inclinations of the flesh."

As Erich's life seeps away, it is not only Jonathan who must face the brutal truth that the "new age" was anything but harmless. Watching Erich die, Clare is repelled by the smell of medicine, the grim irreversibility of "skin turning the color of clay." But far more troubling is her realization that the home which she and Jonathan and Bobby believed they could create and sustain cannot succor a child. It is the child who brings Clare to her senses: As Erich is darkened by the shadow of death, and Jonathan awaits his turn, Clare knows she must take her baby and flee: "What would it do to [Rebecca] if her earliest memories revolved around the decline and eventual disappearance of the people she most adored?" Clare has finally learned the unappeasable obligations of responsibility. In prose that is graceful, tender, and powerfully felt, without a trace of sentimentality, Cunningham skillfully conveys the fragility and sadness of these disparate voices and hearts, groping for the elusive consolations of family, home, and love, adrift in a time of moral dislocation and loss.

Diane Johnson's *Health and Happiness* [6] is also about life and death, but she approaches these grave matters with an altogether different posture, in writing a comic novel about a hospital. Since it hardly needs saying that it's difficult to be funny about illness and pain, the principal object of Johnson's satirical disaffection is not the patients but the doctors, nurses, administrators, and volunteers of Alta Buena, a big and bustling hospital in San Francisco, with all the squabbles, rivalries, tensions, and goofs that attend its daily rounds.

The author of six previous novels – the best of them is *The Shadow Knows*, about a young divorcée, struggling to raise four children on her own, who is spooked by an invisible agent of menace and malice – Johnson has also written biographies of George Meredith's wife and Dashiell Hammett. Herself the wife of a doctor, Johnson is familiar with many aspects of the medical scene, and in *Health and Happiness* she makes good use of a shrewdly observant eye, a retentive memory, and a knowledgeable command of the technical vocabulary necessary to her story. Mainly that story concerns a beautiful young woman, Ivy Tarro, who is hospitalized for a minor but mysterious swelling in her arm. The unmarried mother of an infant daughter, Ivy is the maître d' of a chic San Francisco restaurant, and until this crisis she has been untouched by any serious threats to her health and happiness. But when a careless doctor administers the wrong drug, Ivy sinks into a coma, her very life, let alone health and happiness, critically endangered. Meanwhile the chief of

[6] *Health and Happiness*. By Diane Johnson. Alfred A. Knopf. $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the medical staff, complacently married for years to a rich paragon with perfect taste, falls in love with his lovely patient. In the nick of time, this doctor stays the knife of an overeager surgeon who might have done Ivy irreparable harm, and as she begins to recover, the infatuated chief of medicine has some highly indiscreet sex with her. Alta Buena rocks when the scandal breaks open.

What saves all of this – up to a point – from sounding uncomfortably reminiscent of *General Hospital* and *St. Elsewhere* is Diane Johnson's drily ironic view of the hierarchical structure of a hospital, and her sardonic deflation of the pomposity and overweening self-importance of those who make its life-and-death decisions: "All the doctors, but especially the women, were festooned with stethoscopes slung around their necks, and beepers, to avoid being taken for nurses." At her best, she astutely evokes the way a hospital becomes a world unto itself, disconnected from both the normality and abnormality of life outside, encased in its struggle to outwit death, to defy the unpredictable assaults of the body on itself.

Yet her characters, medical and laymen, fail to develop with sufficient depth or credibility. When Ivy, fully recovered, decides to turn her life around, she is seized by the idea of becoming not only a doctor but a surgeon. Given what we've learned about her, it seems a pathetic inspiration. For one thing, she finds herself saddled with a $48,000 hospital bill that will take years to pay off. There's also the fatherless infant to complicate matters, and Ivy's lack of any qualification for medical school. Yet despite these huge stumbling blocks, "the more [Ivy] thought about medicine, the more plausible, the more inevitable, it seemed. . . . An emotion like religious conversion, like spiritual rededication, burned across her forehead like the wimple of a nun. She wanted to be a doctor." It's completely unclear how Johnson means us to take this delirious inspiration. If it's intended as a sign of Ivy's posthospital weakness, it's unconvincing. If Johnson wants to persuade us that the young woman's dream is not beyond the bounds of possibility, her meaning remains ambiguous.

More wry than genuinely comic in its depiction of this medical world, neither does *Health and Happiness* affect us strongly enough when Johnson turns to the pain and humiliation of illness, the inexorability of death. This is an unreflective novel about a subject that cries out for much more than a superficial episodic cross-section of hospital life laced with ironic detachment. This is not to say that every novel about illness must climb the magic mountain. But a patchy mosaic of half a dozen briskly drawn portraits and plots is too glib to arouse our intense response to the frightening fragility of health, and the way sick people become enslaved by their suffering. What this "comedy" about a hospital

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finally demonstrates is that illness, alas, is no joke.

There is an hallucinatory haze over much of Paul Auster's fiction, even when he seems to be concentrating on ordinary, prosaic, perfectly familiar experience. In the three novels that comprise *The New York Trilogy* (which has been described as an abstract detective story), in the more recent *Moon Palace*, about an orphaned student's search for a father, Auster was intrigued by the enigma and mystery that lurk beneath the commonplace and the everyday, the violent and unaccountable havoc that chance and accident can wreak on seemingly unremarkable lives. Crimes are unspecified and unsolved, ominous symbols swoop and dart in and out of his pages but remain inscrutable, and nothing and no one are what they may at first appear to be.

Auster's new novel, *The Music of Chance*,[7] is to some extent a change of pace. It is tightly plotted, and the fate of its principal characters is made hideously clear. His unadorned prose is taut and vigorous. But his obsession with the random workings of fate is as strong as ever, and the story is dominated, as before, by strangely disordered personalities.

The main figure is a young Boston firefighter, Jim Nashe, around whose head the tiles have been whirling. His wife has left him, his child is being raised by relatives, and his life is out of sync. Unexpectedly he comes into a sizable inheritance, and suddenly, ensnared by "some nameless agitation," he quits his job, buys an expensive new car, and begins crisscrossing the country in a purposeless marathon without a destination: "He was like a crazed animal, careening blindly from one nowhere to the next. . . . That nightlong rush through the emptiness, that rumbling of the road along his skin. . . . As long as he was driving, he carried no burdens, was unencumbered by even the slightest particle of his former life." The Saab becomes an extension of his body, and he of the car's.

As Nashe keeps driving from nowhere to nowhere, he worries about his sinking nest egg. One day, on impulse, he picks up a punk gambler, Pozzi (an echo of Beckett's Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*?), who needs a large stake for a poker game he's arranged with two weird millionaires, winners of an enormous jackpot in the lottery (more workings of chance). Nashe hands over the money – "It was as if he finally had no part in what was about to happen to him" – and when Pozzi loses it all, he and Nashe become the prisoners of their hosts, who are not only crazy but vicious. It all ends disastrously, as we can easily foresee.

The Music of Chance has been described by its publisher as a parable,

[7] *The Music of Chance*. By Paul Auster. Viking. $18.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Auster's lesson seems to be that chance, quirky and unpredictable, controls everything men do and everything done to them. Freedom of choice is a foolish and dangerous delusion, and luck, as in Pozzi's poker game, is mostly bad. This is of course a deeply pessimistic view of man's fate, but it is not morally or philosophically profound. Auster's conception of the unexpected and the unresolved is tricky, not tragic, and it is so overdetermined that it inevitably defeats our willingness to be moved. Moreover, Auster gives us little reason to care about the fate of the two doomed souls; their lives and their deaths yield neither explicit nor subtle meaning. Like Nashe's aimless driving around the country, this novel has no destination. While Auster has been compared with Beckett, he is not in that league. A clever manipulation of the random dishevelments of chance is too contrived to disturb us as Beckett's vision of the unspeakable absurdity of human existence can do.

When Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*[8] won the National Book Award for fiction last year, a disgruntled judge accused the jury of pandering to ideology instead of rewarding literary merit. But Johnson's novel eloquently demonstrates that this complaint was very wide of the mark. *Middle Passage* is a remarkable work of historical imagination as told by a recently freed young slave, Rutherford Calhoun, who has migrated from Illinois to New Orleans in 1830 in search of a liberated and dissolute life. Johnson has elected the distance of history from which to dramatize the appalling reality of the slave trade in nineteenth-century America, and only gradually does he reveal the complex justification for his choice.

A shrewd and witty fellow, Rutherford is a thief and a scamp and an absolute original. The minister who had been his master fed him from boyhood on a gluttonous intellectual diet of theology, philosophy, and literary classics, and Rutherford's learning trips easily off his tongue, sometimes in the most unlikely contexts. For Rutherford, the reputation of a ship's captain has "Brobdingnadian proportions," and a friend's nostalgia for the woman he loved and lost becomes "Sisyphean . . . a quixotic, Parmenidean quest for beauty." To describe a group of African tribesmen, he plucks a ripe allusion to "the Hegelian equation." His meditations are studded with evocations of Kant, Chaucer, St. Thomas, and something he describes with blithe anachronism as "a post-Christian roomscape." Indeed, Johnson deliberately feeds anachronisms into his carefully researched re-creation of history, and these startling intrusions of modernity, like much of Rutherford's erudition, Johnson has described as "a kind of ironic winking at the reader." For him, history can be playful

[8] *Middle Passage*. By Charles Johnson. $17.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as well as solemn, and anachronism can provide a link between past and present.

In New Orleans, Rutherford has been leading a merry and reckless life whoring around, dipping into other men's pockets, and running up huge debts. "I was hooked on sensation, a lecher for perception and the nerve-knocking thrill, like a shot of opium, of new 'experiences.' " He is determined never to become what he contemptuously calls "a gentleman of color," and when he is faced with the impossible choice between a lethal beating by his creditors and a dull life with a straitlaced schoolmarm who offers to pay his debts if he will marry her, Rutherford runs for his life and stows away on an illegal slave ship, the *Republic*, bound for Africa.

As he quickly discovers, conditions on the ship are barbarous. The foul and decrepit vessel is in constant need of makeshift repair, the crew (Rutherford is the only black) a savage gang of "degenerates and dregs," the captain a cultivated but viciously bigoted and predatory dwarf who cares only about his take for the slaves and the stolen artifacts he will transport back to New Orleans. But it is only when the ship reaches the coast of West Africa that the horror of its mission begins to sink in. The inhumanly packed blacks in the stinking hold are the last survivors of the Allmuseri tribe, and while Rutherford is disgusted by the cruel treatment they've received, he gradually comes to understand on the long journey home that he has nothing in common with the captives beyond the color of his skin.

Though he casts his lot with the Allmuseri when they mutiny and take over the ship, he does not feel he is one of them. A deeply spiritual people who abhor "the madness of multiplicity" that will be inflicted on them in America, they yearn for their homeland, though it has been devastated by famine and disease. But Rutherford is a Yankee, and the home that beckons him has nothing to do with Africa. As he tells us toward the end of the terrible journey:

> I desperately dreamed of home. . . . The States were hardly the sort of place a Negro would pine for, but pine for them I did. Even for *that* I was ready now after months at sea, for the strangeness and mystery of black life. . . . There were indeed triumphs, I remembered, that balanced the suffering on shore. . . . If this weird, upside-down caricature of a country called America, if this land of refugees and former indentured servants, religious heretics and half-breeds, whoresons and fugitives – this cauldron of mongrels from all points of the compass – was all I could rightly call *home*, then aye: I was of it. There . . . was where I wanted to be.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Though Rutherford's body has been lacerated, and his soul changed forever, by the harrowing voyage, he knows exactly who he is. Eager to sing a hosanna for his country, he proudly declares himself a patriot. "What Negro, in his heart, if he's not a hypocrite, is not?" And it is at this point that we can finally see Johnson's reason for choosing the distance of history: it allows him to drive home the fact that the blacks of this country are Americans, not Africans, and that Rutherford Calhoun would never think of calling himself an Afro-American.

Middle Passage is not a protest novel, and though it leaves deep scars in the mind, it is free of the self-righteousness and polemical rage that often disfigure the fiction of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Charles Johnson is a Buddhist, which may be one of the reasons he has made it plain in interviews that he speaks only for himself. Equally, like Ralph Ellison before him, he rejects the notion that a single black writer can speak for all the members of a huge and multifarious race. "Our task," as Ellison has insisted, "is that of making ourselves individuals." Charles Johnson's masterly realization of an individual like Rutherford Calhoun is a heartening sign that an American novel is still capable of rendering the somber reality of history and the complexity of human innocence and corruption, and, paradoxically, that it still has a capacity, not in the least naive, for celebration.

Are there any conclusions? Roman soothsayers consulted the entrails of animals to foretell the future; sociologists examine the leavings of literature to uncover the *Zeitgeist*. But it is always too difficult to discern any unambiguous trends in fiction, and in any case it is only minor writing that "reflects" the society of its day. Imaginative literature transcends its time and place without losing its source in experience. Are there any clues? One can say that the stylistic highjinks and verbal somersaults that have been so prominent in the past few years have reached a dead end. Such writers are more than clever and less than serious. Beyond that we can only look, as we must, for the individual novel, such as those by Michael Cunningham and Charles Johnson, that has the stamp of singularity and the ability, all too rare, to change us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GITTA HONEGGER

Thomas Bernhard

Thomas Bernhard, the Austrian novelist, poet, and playwright died as he had lived, in seclusion, in Upper Austria, on February 12, 1989, two days after his fifty-eighth birthday. At the time of his death he was at the center of an embittered, nationwide controversy over his last play, *Heldenplatz*. With its inflammatory wholesale condemnation of Austria's institutionalized trinity, anti-Semitism, socialism, and Catholicism (ubiquitous targets in Bernhard's oeuvre), it was his response to the fifty-year commemoration of the *Anschluss*, Austria's annexation into Hitler's Reich, in March 1983.

Once again Austria found itself in the embarrassing position that its most accomplished and internationally respected writer, in other words, a prized export item – and Austrians like to claim cultural superiority – was also its most outspoken critic, a notorious *Nestbeschmutzer* (an untranslatable term – literally, someone who defiles his own nest – indigenous to the Austrians' relationship to the German language, particularly when it comes to coining new insults). During the last fifteen years or so, the epithet has been reserved almost exclusively for Bernhard, to the point where it became interchangeable with his name.

The controversy started a few months before the play's scheduled opening at the Burgtheater. Against the common practice in German-speaking countries, where plays usually are published before they are produced, the script was kept top secret by director Claus Peymann, who is also the charismatic artistic director of the Burgtheater.

Peymann, as a young director in Hamburg, discovered and pushed Bernhard's unconventional play, which went against the avant-garde fashion initiated by Handke's *Offending the Audience*, over twenty years ago. Bernhard developed his own technique and far surpassed what Handke in his youthful rebellion against "Granddad's theater" could have imagined. Almost all of Bernhard's twenty or so plays had their triumphant premières staged by Peymann, in the theaters of Stuttgart and Bochum, where he had been the artistic director, as well as at the Salzburg Festival. In theatrical terms, Bernhard and Peymann became synonymous. Two of Bernhard's plays were done with the Burgtheater's permanent company with such disastrous results that Bernhard prohibited any further productions in Vienna until Peymann's arrival four seasons ago. That was when Peymann commissioned Bernhard to write a play for the "year of commemoration," as 1988 generally was referred to. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was originally scheduled to open on the one-hundredth birthday of the new building of the Burgtheater, a heavily symbolic date to mark the importance and belated celebration of Bernhard, the enigmatic iconoclast and perennial troublemaker of Austrian letters, as the most important national *Dichter* at Vienna's historic national theater (originally founded and headed by the Kaiser himself, it is over two hundred years old). Previously, Peymann, in a lengthy interview in the prestigious German weekly *Die Zeit*, attacked, in the manner of his favorite playwright and friend, not only every taboo institution held high and dear in Austria, including Catholicism and Waldheim's presidency, but also the Burgtheater and its company. He called its actors stupid and suggested that the building be wrapped by Christo and burnt because it was so full of shit. This led some company members to resign from the cast of *Heldenplatz*, and the opening had to be postponed. The fifty-two year-old Peymann is German: a proud member of the '68 generation of protesters, he has a long history of masterfully engineered public conflicts, part of his *mise-en-scènes* connected to specific local conditions. (Even some of his most supportive critics attribute his missionary zeal to an enormous ego, a childish narcissism and a knack for self-promotion – all qualities which, detractors would say, he shares with his preferred writer and friend.) Forced out of Stuttgart after he had helped pay the dental bills of the Baader-Meinhof group, he took his staff and company of sixty-five or so to Bochum, and from there to Vienna. Most of his company members are German. They replaced some of the ensemble of the Burgtheater, and this created bad feelings among the company. Austrians, of course, are well known for their general dislike of foreigners. Ironically, the Peymann affair divided Austrians along the same lines Waldheim did. In fact, it all but replaced the Waldheim debacle, with Waldheim supporters and most of the local press attacking Peymann. According to some columnists, their animosity towards Peymann, whose unparalleled artistic success so far was eyed by them with jealous suspicion as a new "German invasion" (a particularly resonant term in the year of commemoration), should have proven once and for all that they couldn't possibly be Nazis after all.

The furor over the *Zeit* interview nearly cost Peymann his position at the Burgtheater. It had hardly died down when passages from *Heldenplatz* were leaked to the press, notably the wholesale condemnation of the nation as a stinking cesspit, the Catholic Church as a "worldwide perfidy," with the President a cunning, hypocritical idiot (*Banause*), the Chancellor a conniving broker of nations, all Viennese perpetual anti-Semites, and all 6.5 million Austrians crippled, mad extras on a stage that is the country, crying out for a director who would finally come and push them all into the abyss.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The play's title alone (literally: *Heroes' Square*) resounds with many ironies. It is the name of the square where Hitler was greeted by masses of Viennese upon his triumphant "invasion" of Vienna in March 1938. It is next to the Imperial Palace – the residence of President Waldheim, which is connected to the Burgtheater by a park, the Volksgarten, where one of the play's scenes takes place. Part of the action, saliently set in March 1988, takes place in an apartment with a view of the Heldenplatz. It belongs to the family of Professor Schuster, a Viennese Jew who had emigrated to Oxford, where he taught mathematics. He had returned to Vienna some time after the war, only to realize twenty years later that anti-Semitism is resurfacing more ferociously than ever. His wife is plagued by the sound of the thundering "Sieg Heil" choruses that greeted Hitler on the Heldenplatz. On the eve of their planned "re-emigration" to Oxford, the professor jumps out the window onto the Heldenplatz.

The play picks up on the day of his funeral, on the eve of the family's move to their Austrian country house instead of to Oxford as originally intended. The most explosive lines are spoken by a frail, elderly gentleman, Uncle Robert, while he tries to catch his breath after his brother's burial, on a park bench in an alley of chestnut trees. Their branches, bare and mysterious in the misty quiet of an early spring morning, form a ghostly archway that leads up to the Burgtheater's majestic side wing (with the windows of the Artistic Director's office above lit from inside). The evocative setting touches at the core of every Viennese's most intimate experiences – expatriate, detractor, and loyal local, alike. All of us (including the playwright) have surrendered at one time or another to the exquisite melancholy that spreads over this historic part of the city, under the comforting cover of fog that shields its beauty and mutes its memories. It takes the full force of Bernhard's frustrated anger to clear the fog and expose our own contradictions:

> being a Jew in Austria today means being
> sentenced to death
> people can say and write what they want
> the hatred of Jews is Austria's purest
> guaranteed unfalsified nature

says Uncle Robert, facing the audience where, in the actual geography of the scene, the parliament would be.

It certainly was not the first time that Bernhard's characters would break out into long vituperations against their country, its people, and its conditions. What was new was that they were Jewish, which added extra fuel as well as confusion to the controversy that soon avalanched into a ferocious battle fought out in the time-honored native tradition

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of zealous factionalism and politicized bloodthirst. Fueled by vicious editorials, by statements of public figures who found themselves attacked in those passages, including Waldheim and Chancellor Vranitzky, celebrities and would-be VIP's from all walks of life – none of whom had read the complete script – and followed by letters to the editors, the most malicious insults were exchanged in a style that recalled the rhetoric of Vienna's troubled past, with implications that Hitler would have known what to do with the likes of Peymann and Bernhard. Bernhard himself was hit with a walking stick by an elderly gentleman, right in the center of Vienna's fashionable first district; the tires of a prominent Bernhard actor from Peymann's German company were repeatedly slashed; and Peymann received threatening letters.

The preproduction drama, fueled on both sides, it seems, with devious (as a native Viennese I am tempted to call it typically Austrian) pleasure, reached a feverish pitch on the day of the opening. The *Kronenzeitung*, Austria's most sensationalist, arch-conservative tabloid, a staunch supporter of Waldheim and opponent of Bernhard and Peymann, displayed on its front page an "ad on its own behalf," consisting of a photomontage of the Burgtheater in flames with the suggestive caption "Uns ist nichts zu heiss," meaning "We're not afraid of fire." One critic pointed out that this was just a few days before the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*.

Demonstrators had built a dungheap in front of the theater in reference to a line in the play that implied the whole country was a dungheap. The over four-hour long performance was followed by forty minutes of thundering applause, standing ovations, boos and whistles, with the Austrian flag and banners unfolding from the balcony both in support of and against Peymann, who bowed next to Bernhard. Although it is customary for playwrights in Germany to take a bow after an opening performance, this was the first time it had happened in Austria. To some, the two men, their hands clasped and held up high, appeared like a triumphant pair of conquerors as the "Sieg Heil" choruses on stage segued hauntingly into the warring choruses in the auditorium. In its ironic ambivalence, the image was quintessentially Austrian. In the end, the artists' victory manifested itself most seductively in the shrill voices of the shrewdly manipulated crowd at their feet.

In view of the later Rushdie affair all of this might seem like frivolous, if somewhat outlandish, histrionics. And indeed, all of Vienna, in Peymann's brilliantly calculating *mise-en-scène*, seemed to act out the kind of bizarre comedy that only Bernhard, whose works repeatedly demonstrate how in Austria history was instantly turned into a perverse operetta, could have invented. If his infamous attacks on Austria and Austrians hadn't driven home his point, the Austrians' visceral response

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certainly did. Intentionally or not, Bernhard seemed destined to bring out the worst in his fellow citizens, who continued his drama in the streets and in the press. No doubt, Bernhard himself was also a masterful public performer of the *Nestbeschmutzer* who, in his most ferocious distortions, was no match for the real *Schmutz* in Waldheim's nest. But there was always the other side to the mask. Some say that he was more deeply wounded than ever by the reactions to *Heldenplatz*.

The last time I saw Bernhard was during the summer before his death, at the height of the Peymann scandal. Rehearsals for *Heldenplatz* were already under way (four months before the scheduled opening!), but many of the one-hundred forty-four members of the Burgtheater's company were angry and hurt by Peymann's condescending remarks. In solidarity with the ensemble, his lead actor had just resigned. There were strong demands for Peymann's resignation, from within the theater, from government circles, and from the public. Peymann, who already had written some letters of apology, was expected to explain himself further that evening on television, on the popular discussion program *Café Zentral*.

I met Bernhard at the Café Imperial, in the famous old Hotel Imperial. Like Uncle Robert in *Heldenplatz*, he was a self-confessed newspaper and tabloid junkie, who without them would "suffocate": "without that Austrian newspaper crap/ You save yourself huge amounts of costly medication/ if you expose yourself first thing in the morning to the complete idiocy of the *Kronenzeitung* and the *Kurier*/ that get your circulation going in a rage first thing in the morning."

Like so many Viennese, he spent much time in cafés, reading international newspapers with his cup of coffee and glass of water, quietly refilled by unhurried waiters. The Imperial was a rather odd choice, its ambience a bit staid and perfunctory compared, say, to the nostalgic charm of the Sacher. As I think about it now, whether deliberate or not, it was a shrewdly theatrical setting – in the midst of *Anschluss* preoccupations and Heldenplatz speculations. Hitler had waved to the crowds from the hotel's central balcony facing the Ringstrasse. A Jewish friend of mine, an elderly gentleman who recently had returned to Vienna for the first time since the war, was told by a proud waiter that he was sitting in the same chair Hitler had sat in. Children, particularly girls, who grew up in Vienna right after the war remember the hotel as the headquarters of the occupying Soviet Army, with the uniformed guards as the incarnations of the terror and the sins of war hinted at in hushed stories and in whispered, euphemistic warnings.

Bernhard seemed restless, preoccupied, and frail. In the years I had known him, the tall, seemingly athletic build which belied his delicate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

health gave way to an altogether narrower frame. His shoulders were slightly bent forward. His strong, handsome features, suggesting his peasant origins, had gradually mellowed as his face got thinner. Now it was framed by white sideburns and soft gray, thinning hair which he had let grow longer. His eyes, sunk a bit deeper, still had that enigmatic court jester's smile waiting in ambush to catch his visitor off guard. He was dressed as usual with the casual but nevertheless carefully considered elegance of someone who skillfully camouflages his vanity by the nonchalance associated with old money and inherited taste. (Earlier, he had prided himself on having spent the first year of his life on a fishing boat in Rotterdam, the descendant of Austrian peasants, farmers, horse-dealers, innkeepers, and butchers. He never knew his father, and his mother went from Austria to Holland to give birth to him – the customary way poor women hid the "shame" of an illegitimate child. She worked as a housekeeper to support them both.) Altogether he appeared almost ethereal, the aging poet laureate of Habsburg breeding in striking contrast to his robust public stance.

Bernhard fretted about the length of the rehearsal period for *Heldenplatz*; the actors were already over-rehearsed and had lost their spontaneity. During the ten years I had visited him, usually on the occasion of an opening of one of his plays (which he never attended), this was the first time he betrayed any sign of interest or emotional stake in a production; he was irritated that Peymann was ready to apologize for his interview. "What he said was good. It was the truth. I stand behind what I say, and I don't turn around and say I didn't mean it. That's exactly what they've been waiting for. He's becoming their *Hampelmann*, and that's where they want him. That's how they get you. If they'd announce that Peymann will be hanged on the Heldenplatz, they would all come running. Just as they came running when Hitler came, screaming for blood. That's how they are."

That night Peymann and his staff of codirectors unexpectedly cancelled their television appearance. Other more or less well-known substitutes discussed the affair and answered phoned-in comments – most prominently the Viennese-born Maximilian Schell, whose presence led to speculations among more malicious insiders that this was his public audition for Peymann's job. The program turned into a silly shouting match between old members of the Burgtheater company who hadn't played a decent part in years and some local theater critics and journalists. Among them was André Müller, an internationally respected German journalist who had conducted the *Zeit* interview. As the evening's outsider, he didn't get much chance to talk, while the participants outyelled each other and the show's celebrated host, Ernst Marboe, looked on passively with a nondescript smile that invited different readings from content to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

helplessness and *Schadenfreude*. All in all, everybody seemed to enact a classic Bernhard scene of exaggerated theatricality marked, typically, by the absence of the central character.

Under the circumstances, the play itself could only be anticlimactic for those who might have expected a political thriller or an emotional psychological drama about anti-Semitism and the situation of Jews in Waldheim's Austria. Bernhard employs the same unrelenting dramaturgy of his previous plays, which are usually dominated by the voice of one speaker (more often than not an overbearing, misanthropic and somewhat cranky old man), who continues to talk obsessively and relentlessly with only a few interruptions from others. Or he is quoted at length and with equal obsessiveness by those who learned from him. The format of the speeches is the same in all plays. Bernhard never uses punctuation marks. Instead, he breaks down individual sentences into several lines, so that meaning and emotional pitch are revealed through their rhythmical structuring. Action, as it unfolds in conventional dialogue, is replaced by a deliberately musical structure of themes and their insistent repetitions and variations. His characters' loquacious excursions traverse the entire landscape of popular *Weltanschauung* and alienated iconoclasm mapped out in the familiar peaks and hidden ravines of their native idiom, underscored by the deceptively cozy flow of Austrian speech rhythms and codified in the idioms that had been distilled, perfected, and finally ossified through the use and abuse of generations. They are the bitterly comic relics in a country that shrank from a global empire to a tiny *Alpenrepublik*, marionettes suspended on the cultural strings of their shared language, clinging to the arrogance and self-important posturing of an entire culture frozen in anachronistic gestures of imperial domination. In Bernhard's tragic universe, fate is language, the Austrian language. There is no escape, although many characters try. Modeled after Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bernhard's favorite native archetype, they seek refuge in Cambridge or Oxford or, like Bernhard himself, in Mallorca, Rome, or Crete. The price of resistance to the traps of language is usually madness. In this doomed world, the Jew represents its most tragic victim and serves as its most extreme paradigm. Professor Schuster in *Heldenplatz* is one of Bernhard's classic madmen who could not survive because he could not be reconciled with his predicament. He got homesick for his native culture. His love of music lured him back to Vienna, although "he could only hear the music/ when he stopped hearing/ the national-socialist orientation of the concert-goers/ he had to as they say cover both his ears and eyes/ in order to hear the music." "We walked straight into the Viennese trap/ We walked straight into the Austrian trap," says his brother. They are not just victims in the context of persistent Austrian anti-Semitism; they are also victims of their own Austrian-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness. This dialectic gives the play a dangerous edge in the unrest and confusion of Waldheim's Vienna.

One of the most scathing attacks came from Peter Sichrovsky, a local Jewish journalist. He condemned Bernhard for using a Jew to vent his own obsessions and what's worse, to lend the victim certain features of the oppressor. "A director from Bochum aided by an Austrian writer makes a Jew bark like a German Shepherd," he wrote, although he never actually saw the director's work. He called for a boycott of the production after he read the play, which he reviewed on the day of the opening. The son of Austrian parents who had emigrated to England and returned to Vienna after the war, forty-three year-old Sichrovsky has established himself as one of the most outspoken representatives of his generation of Austrian Jews. He is the author of *Strangers in Their Own Land* and *Born Guilty*, both collections of interviews with children of survivors and of Nazi criminals, respectively. In his play, *Das Abendmahl* (*The Supper*, as in *The Last Supper*, also commissioned by Peymann for the year of commemoration), he attempted to dramatize the traumatic division in Austria's postwar generation. (As a Strindbergian phantasmagoria of a radically fueled sadomasochistic relationship, between the son of a survivor and the daughter of a former camp commander, it is much more interesting in its concept than in its somewhat strained execution.) From Sichrovsky's very specific perspective and expectations, Bernhard failed to concern himself with the immediate needs of the second Holocaust generation in their struggle to rediscover their heritage and redefine their identity as Viennese Jews. The majority of Jewish critics applauded the playwright and the theater for exposing Waldheim's Vienna in all its monstrous crassness.

In the aftermath of the prolongued *Heldenplatz* drama, the Burgtheater published a two-hundred ninety-five-page book: *Heldenplatz – A Documentation*, compiled by Peymann's brainy dramaturges who are also his longtime codirectors. It contains all the responses to the play, from the early, gossip-based preproduction scandals to reviews and comments from all over Europe, and includes fan mail as well as sanguine letters in blatant Nazi jargon addressed to Peymann. Its elegant format, an oversized version of Peymann's Burgtheater programs, which usually contain the playscript, suggests that this is also a playtext of the drama surrounding the drama. As such it offers a mind-boggling look at the national psyche as released by the play, while foreign critics watched dumbfounded, and a little jealously, the kind of feverish passion theater could still elicit in Vienna.

Some might question the volume as the self-dramatization of the Burgtheater's leaders' (inflated) sense of historic mission. One can't quite help the suspicion that with all the best intentions they bask in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hooplah with as much *Schadenfreude* as their most rabid opponents, and that history, the darkest moments in the history of this century, are being exploited for one of the most basic theatrical impulses: the need to show off.

Along with his sudden death Bernhard provided a shocking finale to the *Heldenplatz* controversy that caused – once again – much embarrassment for Austria and a great deal of anxiety for his publishers and, most importantly, for Claus Peymann. In his will he stipulated that none of his plays be performed and none of his books be published in Austria, nor that any unpublished material from his estate, including any letters or *Zettel* (notes), be quoted or published anywhere in the world. This would mean that *Heldenplatz* and several of Peymann's other exemplary Bernhard productions in the Burgtheater's repertoire could no longer be shown and that production plans for the yet unproduced play *Elisabeth* would have to be cancelled. (Lawyers will be busy for some time to come trying to find loopholes in the text of the will.) Bernhard also prohibited any memorial services in Austria or any kind of commemorative event in any other country, if it were supported by Austrian money or institutions.

In *Heldenplatz*, the character Professor Schuster requests in his will that his death not be made public until a week after his funeral. Bernhard, too, had asked in his testament (made two days before he died) that his death be announced only after his funeral. His brother and sole heir, Dr. Peter Fabjan, a physician, saw him through the last days of his illness and arranged for a secret burial at Vienna's Grinzing Cemetery (the final resting place of yet another infamous figure of the Viennese theater, Gustav Mahler, whose exasperated question: "Why must one be dead so that they'll let one live?" could have been triggered only by his harrowing experiences as director of the Vienna State Opera.) According to Bernhard's wish, only three relatives were present.

It is tempting to speculate about the motives behind this last gesture of negation. Some say that this time, the crucible of *Heldenplatz* was simply too much and that Bernhard died of a broken heart. Some of the more clinically inclined among his fellow writers suggest that it had to happen some day, that he finally choked on the volcanic force of his enraged rhetoric. There might even be a small comfort in perceiving his death as a sadly metaphoric ending to his unrequited, misunderstood, maniacal pursuit of an impossible love. Cues for his soft spots, for those who cared to look for them, were planted throughout his work and most prominently in his notorious *roman-á-clef, Woodcutters*. (Its publication a few years ago created a similar furor when Bernhard had it withdrawn from Austrian bookstores, in response to a libel suit from a one-time friend who saw himself in the character of a failed, mediocre

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

composer.) The novel that stands as the most savage indictment of his own circle of friends ("Artistic corpses, failures, Viennese failures, the living dead of the artistic world – writers, painters, dancers, and hangers-on, artistic cadavers not yet quite dead") and, by implication, of himself, surges towards the end in a Mahlerian apotheosis of his much maligned city:

> . . . and as I ran, I reflected that the city through which I was running, dreadful though I had always felt it to be, was still the best city there was, that Vienna which I found detestable and had always found detestable, was suddenly once again the best city in the world, my own city, my beloved Vienna, and that these people, whom I had always hated and still hated and would go on hating, were still the best people in the world: I hated them, yet found them somehow touching – I cursed these people, yet could not help loving them – I hated Vienna, yet couldn't help loving it. . . .

With the *mise-en-scéne* or, rather, the anti-*mise-en-scéne* of his own death, Bernhard also sabotaged a favorite national pastime. Austrians are notorious for their enjoyment of the proverbial *schöne Leiche* (exquisite corpse), magnificently staged funerals for its heads of state and other celebrities – the cortège of legendary actors from the Burgtheater, for example, will move down the Ringstrasse and circle the Burgtheater. No doubt Bernhard would have qualified for such posthumous honors. Many among those buried in splendor were *personae non gratae* or had been driven out during their lifetime – as was highlighted recently by the anachronistic pomp of an "authentic" Habsburg funeral for Empress Zita, banished from Austria after the collapse of the monarchy in 1919, only to be returned to the Habsburg family crypt in the same splendid horse-drawn coach that was used for Kaiser Franz Josef in 1916.

Following the tradition of Nestroy, Karl Kraus, and Elias Canetti, Bernhard never tired of satirizing the perverse theatricality of Austrian society, which he chastised and exposed with as much perverse pleasure in his plays and novels and in his rare but always explosive public statements. No one understood this national penchant for public drama better than he, a notorious recluse with an enormous appetite for histrionics which he never denied. In the course of his distinguished writing career that established him as one of the giants of German literature along with Kafka, Thomas Mann, and Robert Musil, he also perfected himself as the classic fool who claimed all that character's historic privileges as shameless public scourge and made instant fools out of those who tried to get too close to him or claimed to understand him. His death was as contradictory and controversial as his life: his last grand theatrical coup and a quiet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

departure that insisted one more time to be reckoned with beyond clichéd assumptions, in all his contradictions and his ambivalent love-hate relationship towards Austria.

He lived a solitary life on his farm in a remote little village in Upper Austria without a telephone and with a Mercedes and a jeep. But his habits also made him an easily traceable public figure. Every morning at seven he drove to the Rathaus Café in nearby Gmunden, a picturesque resort at Lake Traunsee, to read all the available newspapers and tabloids over breakfast. This is where his friends and collaborators in the publishing and theater worlds would try to reach him by telephone. When he wasn't around, the waitresses always gave information about his whereabouts.

From his work people expected him to be a forbidding, brooding figure. But he was a very kind, charming, polite gentleman with a great sense of humor and a ready laugh. "I get rid of my misery in writing. I don't have to live it," he once told me. In contrast to his public image as a raging misanthrope, he was extremely loyal to the people he loved – most notably his maternal grandfather, Johannes Freumbichler, a novelist whose work was published posthumously, whose *Weltanschauung* and patriarchal temperament had the most crucial influence on the boy who would later use him as a model for many of his characters of old thinkers, isolated and on the verge of madness in their singleminded pursuit of one idea. For most of his adult life, he was closest to a Viennese woman thirty years his senior, whom he had met at the age of eighteen, one year before his mother died, during one of his prolonged stays in a sanitarium for treatment of his persistent lung ailment. Her support enabled the young man to concentrate exclusively on his writing, which led to his first major breakthrough with his novel, *Frost*, at the age of thirty-two. (It stopped him from proceeding with his plans to join a missionary organization in Africa.) Known to those who knew Bernhard as *die Tante* (the Aunt), he refers to her in *Wittgenstein's Nephew* as his *Lebensmensch*, (inadequately translated as "companion"), the term coined by Bernhard like so many other unmistakably "Bernhardian" expressions which, in the meantime, have entered the German vocabulary. As a variation on the commonly used *Lebensgefährte* for "companion," or "partner," it suggests a relationship not only for life, but as a matter of life or death. And in fact, Bernhard survived her by only five years. His profoundly moving novel *Alte Meister* (*Old Masters*), also known as *Komödie*, was written in response to her death.

Bernhard was also known for suddenly shutting the heavy wooden gates to his farmhouse to all visitors and for cutting people out of his life for no apparent reason at all. He often insisted, privately and through his work, that he was not a letter writer. Yet his impassioned letters to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

editor would pop up in a variety of Austrian and German newspapers. Over the years, he answered only a few of my letters, but whenever we met he would comment when he hadn't heard from me in a while. "I thought you were dead," he once said jokingly, which sounded strange to me, coming from a man for whom death always had been such a concrete reality. When he wrote, he was either on the run from Austria somewhere in the Mediterranean or just returning, and his letters read as if spoken by someone up on his feet, running breathlessly, with his thoughts and emotions running ahead of him. He finally had a telephone installed and advised me in a letter that dialing his number would connect me directly to the center of hell. There are three exclamation points in the first paragraph of that letter, which echoes his narrator's restless obsession with the deadly inhospitality of the same Austrian landscape in the novel *Concrete*. There, in the midst of winter, he suddenly latches onto the thought of leaving his country house for Palma:

> I shall be leaving a country in which the church practices hypocrisy and in which socialism, having come to power, practices exploitation, and in which art says whatever is acceptable to these two. I shall be leaving a country in which a people educated to stupidity allows its ears to be stopped by the church and its mouth by the state, and in which everything I hold sacred has for centuries ended up in the slop pails of the rulers. If I go away, I told myself, sitting in the iron chair, I shall only be going away from a country in which I no longer have any place and in which I have never found happiness. If I go away, I shall be going away from a country in which the towns stink and the inhabitants of the towns have become coarsened. I shall be going away from a country in which the language has become vulgar and for the most part deranged. I shall be going away from a country, I told myself, sitting in the iron chair, in which the only model of behavior is set by the so-called wild animals. I shall be going away from a country in which the darkest night prevails at noonday, and in which virtually the only people in power are blustering illiterates. If I go away, I told myself, sitting in the iron chair, I shall be leaving the disgusting, depressing, and unconscionably filthy public lavatory of Europe.

The passage which begins with the damnation of the church is driven by urgent incantations in the insistent repetitions of a church litany, a mad prayer from "the center of hell." By contrast, his last published text was a letter to the editor of a small rural paper, the *Salzkammergutzeitung*, dated January 12, 1989. In it, he protests the planned discontinuation of the local trolley of Gmunden:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Every time I return from abroad, I keep thinking that I am returning to one of the most beautiful areas in the world, and certainly Gmunden is the absolute highlight in all of Salzkammergut, as far as the town and its environs are concerned. To my horror I find out in your paper for which I have the highest regard that the trolley will be discontinued. There is no greater catastrophe that could befall this town which I love so much! It is this trolley which is one of the most prominent landmarks of this town and I use it with the greatest pleasure every time I arrive at the train station. This trolley is a gem and irreplacable, and Gmunden would lose one of its biggest attractions among old and young alike. . . ."

Bernhard finally succumbed to the lung ailment which had marked him for death since his teens, but which he turned into "the main spring of his existence," as he put it in *Wittgenstein's Nephew*. All his work is informed by his lifelong experience of closest proximity to death. Ultimately, it was his and his characters' rage that kept them going in their passionate and, as they themselves knew, futile and often grimly comical pursuit of their own brand of uncompromising truth. "I rave, therefore I am" is the precept to their survival, which earned Bernhard a nickname borrowed from his many linguistic inventions, *Überlebenskünstler*. (Literally, "survival artist," it is a play on the common expression *Lebenskünstler*, someone who knows how to live.) In Bernhard's Beckett–like, postcatastrophe universe, the art and the comedy and tragedy of it all lie in one's astonishing feats of survival in a world marked by death. Therefore, his death came as a shock to all of us who had begun to trust (and rely on) his art of survival more than his closeness to death. Yet even his death seemed a deliberately staged, marvelously consistent continuation of his life.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MORRIS DICKSTEIN

The Pursuit for the Ordinary

The disappearance within the past decade of John Cheever, Bernard Malamud, Donald Barthelme, and Raymond Carver seemed to mark the symbolic passing of three separate generations in American fiction. There were many other important writers, but somehow these four seemed especially emblematic of the postwar decades when their best work first emerged.

At a time when the Wasp novel of manners had already expired in America, Cheever, in a series of brilliant stories for *The New Yorker*, chronicled the hidden anxieties of a postwar generation of young urban professionals who were now raising children in the fashionable suburbs. Despite his lighthearted tone and a taste for whimsy and fantasy, Cheever was a scrupulous realist and a keen social observer. Yet his stories were also rooted in his own obsessions and concealments, which have become clearer since his death – his ambivalence towards his family, his half-suppressed homosexuality, his self-destructive alcoholism – all couched behind the facade of the country gentleman. But as time passes, his work has emerged as a painstaking record of American morals and manners in the years immediately following the war.

Bernard Malamud's poor, luckless ghetto Jews seem a world away from Cheever's tennis-playing, hard-drinking Wasps. Though Saul Bellow, with his more varied body of work, was able to maintain his creative edge for a longer period, Malamud, who died in 1986, was the purest of the Jewish-American writers who emerged in the forties and fifties. Like Cheever, he showed little interest in the larger world of politics and society. His wraith-like characters, who barely live in the world yet grievously suffer from it, are caught up in their own private griefs, which are relieved only by Malamud's comic (and cosmic) sense of the ironies of fate, his bittersweet Jewish imagination of disaster. Much more than Cheever, Malamud was a fabulist, a descendant of Hawthorne and Kafka, who turned each story into moral allegory, a parable of his own characters' distance from life and their desperate hunger for it.

By the late 1960s, Malamud's style of wrenching moral anguish had worn as thin as Cheever's vein of sparkling social observation. If Malamud seemed too grimly involved, too earnest, Cheever appeared alto-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gether too smoothly detached, too well-defended. Both were consummate craftsmen, yet their stories seemed too *written*, too finished, for a world that was coming apart. The explosive contradictions of the age, with its noisy public confrontations and wild loss of inhibitions, demanded a fiction that was more fragmentary and surreal, more sophisticated yet also more carnivalesque. The age demanded Donald Barthelme, whose inspired *bricolage* swept up everything from Snow White to Tolstoy, from Robert Kennedy to Kierkegaard.

Barthelme's early stories, with their haunting illustrations and obscure titles, were a Sargasso Sea of the whole history of culture. The taste of the sixties, grounded in Pop Art, had undone the old cultural hierarchies, especially those that divided trash from art. It fostered a metafiction that would look more assembled than written, a two-dimensional, open-ended fiction toying with its own devices, acutely conscious of its fictionality. But Barthelme went beyond this clever reflexiveness; his work was elegant and dry, witty and detached, facetiously mock-serious. Yet, for a few years in the late 1960s, it was also full of powerful intimations of mystery and pathos. For all his debts to playful, nonlinear writers of the past, from Laurence Sterne to Borges, Barthelme was an original, a writer with a different tone, a new way of processing cultural waste.

Barthelme, like Thomas Pynchon, situated himself neatly "on the leading edge of this trash phenomenon," but with the passage of time his work became flatter and less magical; his prose remained elegant, his wit was undimmed, but the deeper current of feeling ran dry, the ironies grew predictable. He had gone to the well once too often. The 1970s, with its fuel crises and chronic recessions and political disasters, from the loss of Vietnam to the fiasco of Watergate, were in every way a more pinched and depressed period than the sixties. As the economy soured and America's role in the world seemed to contract, the culture needed a writer who reflected the downbeat mood, the sense of frustration and failure that worked its way into the fiber of individual lives. No writer was less suited to play the role of social prophet than Raymond Carver. Despite his meticulous craftsmanship, a thick fog of depression hangs over his early collections of stories. Yet they tell us a great deal about forgotten American lives. Most of Carver's stories are set in the Pacific Northwest; his blue-collar characters live far from the mainstream of upper middle-class life, with its chic urban irony and sophistication. These stories deal not with cosmic dilemmas but with the routine unhappiness of marriage and family life, in which subjects like alcoholism, casual infidelity, dull jobs, and unemployment have become trite. Carver's characters are not especially sensitive or introspective, but he never condescends to them or directly judges them; instead, he works their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

constricted awareness into his technique. In Carver's mature work, less is more: less psychology, less literary language, less continuous narration, only spare disjunctive details which we ourselves as readers must assemble. A Carver story is like a do-it-yourself fiction kit.

With the exhaustion of metafiction, Carver's work, along with that of Ann Beattie, Bobbie Ann Mason, Richard Ford, and Tobias Wolff, represented a return to realism and regionalism in American fiction, a rediscovery of "ordinary" life and ordinary people – that is, of life as it is lived among the shopping malls and K-Marts, in suburban ranch houses and in factory jobs, lives pitted by divorce, family violence, and a general sense of defeat. Carver's characters are losers, people who mess up, who invariably make the wrong choices, and his "realism" is as narrow in its horizons as these people's hopes. Many of his stories are barely anecdotes, with little apparent shape or resolution. They record the *disjecta membra* of experience without the emotion or understanding that would give them meaning. Yet this uneventfulness, at once casual and arbitrary, is as deceptive as the seeming realism.

Carver's famous minimalism is a post-Beckett realism that has been through the forge of modernist skepticism and despair. Carver avoided physical description, narrative texture, atmospheric detail, and authorial commentary, and he even began to remove them from stories he'd already published. In addition to his regular collections, Carver put out several small-press chapbooks of his poetry and prose, such as a 1977 book of stories called *Furious Seasons*. Some of these were short prose experiments that Carver never reprinted; they show his restless attempts to develop some fictional form that would perfectly match his dark vision. Three longer stories, "Dummy," "Distance," and "So Much Water So Close to Home," reappeared in his next regular collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, but so drastically rewritten that they are almost unrecognizable. These changes show how deliberately Carver worked at the style that would prove irresistible to other American writers.

Few other writers have given us stories in such strikingly different versions. In these revisions we see Carver ruthlessly paring these tales down, roughing up the narrative, removing descriptive details, metaphors, and all traces of wistful, coming-of-age lyricism; we watch him turn long rolling paragraphs into choppy, staccato bulletins, often just fragments of dialogue separated by silence and vacancy. Everything "literary" becomes colloquial and demotic; instead of reading a generalized narration, a 'normal' language of storytelling, we hear someone's offbeat voice in these new versions, the same voice we hear in the tinny, repetitious titles that became a Carver trademark ("Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?"; "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love").

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The revised stories even get different titles; thus "Dummy" becomes "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off," and "Distance" turns into "Everything Stuck to Him." The third story, "So Much Water So Close to Home," keeps its title but loses three-quarters of its text, as if a Giacometti sculpting with words had hacked away at it in a wild frenzy. It becomes skeletal, fragmentary, discontinuous, detached from all explanation: the enigmatic, boiled-down essence of the story it had been. The characters are the same, even the "story" is the same, but now the meaning must take shape in the mind of the reader; it's nowhere explicit in the words on the page.

In Carver's work, the surreal, associative logic of a Barthelme collage has infiltrated the terrain of a minute domestic realism, making it wild and jazzy and grimly comical. Just as there is an infinite sadness buried in Barthelme's worldliness and cultivation, there's a zany nihilistic humor at the heart of Carver's low-rent tragedies. Malamud and Cheever, like their great contemporary Flannery O'Connor, were masters of the kind of story that could say so much so quickly, stories that were perfectly condensed, lapidary, wise. Barthelme and Carver, in their different ways, took the story into a period when writers understood less and less of what was happening, when all meanings were a jumble and short takes became attractive because they were modest and fragmentary, and took so little purchase on reality. Carver's so-called minimalism – its implications were anything but minimal – was perfectly suited to a period when Americans were lowering their expectations, learning to live with limitation, to make fewer demands in their own lives.

In the last phase of his career, before he died in 1988, Carver himself changed. As his own life grew happier, as the nation itself, led by a relentless cheerleader, began recovering some of its morale, his stories became longer, less cacophonous, more fluent and optimistic. In his final revisions Carver now began to add, not to subtract. "Distance" recovered its title and some of its lost text. Only two years after it appeared, one of his saddest stories, "The Bath," became "A Small, Good Thing," one of his most quietly affirmative. Here, the accidental death of a young boy, so harsh and meaningless in the earlier text, sets the stage for a moment of quiet human contact as Carver shows us how life goes on, even for the bereaved parents.

Carver's last story, "Errand," is about the death of Chekhov, but even more about the glass of champagne he drinks before his death, and about the doctor and the woman at his bedside, and especially about the room-service boy who brings the bottle. Soon to be facing death himself, Carver focused on survival – yet also, true to himself, emphasized the banal details that make death and survival more bearable, more ordinary. At the end Carver sacrificed the spareness of Hemingway (the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first minimalist) and the bleakness of Kafka for the elemental human warmth he found in Chekhov. His work lost some of its creepy edge, its dead-end aura of desperation and defeat, but he gained something as well, a renewed sense of human possibility.

It would be impossible to overestimate the effect of Carver's work on American writers of the 1980s. When Cheever, Malamud, and Barthelme died, their best work was long behind them; they were the venerable markers of certain key moments in American letters. Carver, for all his modesty, passed from the scene at the height of his powers, with the evidence of his handiwork all around him. "Encountering Carver's fiction early in the 1970s was a transforming experience for many writers of my generation," wrote Jay McInerney, the ultra-hip author of *Bright Lights, Big City*. "No other writer was as much discussed and mimicked by the writers one met at readings and writers' conferences." His influence was everywhere, from brat-pack novelists like McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis (*Less Than Zero*), and Tama Janowitz (*Slaves of New York*) to fastidious minimalists like Amy Hempel (*Reasons to Live*), Frederick Barthelme (*Second Marriage*), and Mary Robison (*Oh!, Days*).

What these trendy writers learned from Carver – or rather, misunderstood in him – proved disastrous for them. He taught them to focus on observed details, to listen for snatches of revealing talk, as all writers must. But somehow (like the early imitators of Hemingway) they came to believe that the essence of fiction was leaving things out, not only literary texture but the shaping of a plot, not only psychology and description but all emotional involvement. No matter what happened, they seemed too cool to care or too damaged to react. They avoided the easy pattern of anecdotal complication and epiphany of the traditional story but had little but sheer sensation to substitute; their random slices of life were too thin to be nourishing. At the height of its newfound prestige, the short story was going nowhere.

What these writers largely missed in Carver was the social and emotional anchor of his work. Carver himself was something of a dead-end character. Many of the blue-collar jobs he described, he himself had held. He could be as self-destructive, could feel as defeated, as anyone in his work. He knew from the inside the lives of auto mechanics and grocery clerks and recovering alcoholics. The laconic flatness, the dogged ordinariness of his prose belonged to the way of life of a definite region, a class, even a certain landscape. The modest humanism of his last phase was a hard-won achievement. His style could not easily be transposed to the fashionable disco world of New York or the moneyed teenage drug scene in L. A. – let alone the brand-name world of a yuppie serial-killer. It could not be reduced to a distancing device or a formal experiment in literary language. Ellis's flat, horrific *American Psycho* was the ultimate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mismatch of style and subject.

The writers who best reflected Carver's vision were those who shared his regional, lower-class background, his feeling for the unhappy lives of ordinary Americans. Two of the most promising to emerge in the 1980s were Richard Ford, who came from Mississippi, and Russell Banks, who grew up in New Hampshire. Before American literature was urbanized, writers who escaped from the small towns and provincial Midwestern cities had always written with a mixture of sympathy and horror about the worlds that produced them, the Winesburg, Ohios, and Gopher Prairies. More recently John Updike in his Rabbit novels, Bobbie Ann Mason in *Shiloh and Other Stories*, and Joyce Carol Oates (in *Marya* and other works set in western New York) showed how powerfully they could imagine the joyless lives that might easily have entrapped them back home. But Richard Ford in *Rock Springs*, a brilliant collection of related stories mostly set in his adopted Northwest, came closest to matching Carver on his own ground.

This is straight Carver country: as men go off hunting and fishing, and come back drunken and violent, we see marriages disintegrating, people drifting apart, children losing all contact with parents. A mood of ineffable sadness infuses these stories, as in Ford's best-known novel, *The Sportswriter* (1986). The novel is a long, slow work in which very little happens, a book whose hero suffers from depressive fits of "dreaminess" which are only dispelled toward the end, when he begins to give up his secret mourning for his lost child, his dead marriage, his aborted career as a writer. Until then, Ford's alter ego clings to the surface of the familiar as a refuge from depression. When a friend kills himself he is puzzled. "He could've hunted up a reason to keep breathing," he thinks. "What else is the ordinary world good for except to supply reasons not to check out early."

The relentless yet lyrical banality of *The Sportswriter* – which reminded me of the quietly desperate musings of Walker Percy's 1961 novel *The Moviegoer* – is the very definition of the contemporary pursuit of the ordinary. Yet Ford shrewdly makes this cheery suburban emptiness part of his hero's problem, his defensive mask, something he must begin to put behind him.

In *Rock Springs* (and its companion piece, the short novel *Wildlife*) Ford evokes the ordinariness of his characters' lives in a different way, as if he were shaping a myth around it. Unlike Carver, who avoided all 'literary' flourishes, Ford treats these people as if they were the material of legend. At his worst Ford strains too hard for a resonant simplicity; he can sound like the Old Man of the Mountain, imparting folk-wisdom around a cracker-barrel. But Ford also restores the lyricism Carver mercilessly pruned from his early stories. The speaker in Ford's fiction is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

often the same character, a man about forty, depressed, emotionally disabled, gazing back with fatal clarity at the early twists and turns which made his life whatever it became: a father's sudden act of violence, a mother's abandonment of the family, a husband's chronic infidelity, a teenage boy's numb acquiescence to disaster.

One story, "Great Falls," begins: "This is not a happy story. I warn you." But as the suffocating details pile up grimly, Ford is preparing us for a bold rhetorical leap. His stories often end in large unanswerable questions that point to some hollowness, some huge inevitability that underlies human relationships, "some coldness in us all, some helplessness that causes us to misunderstand life when it is pure and plain." These rhetorical gestures are just what any sensible editor would urge the writer to eliminate, but their effect can be exhilarating, heartbreaking. They echo with a bottomless sadness, yet give a larger, almost cosmic dignity to the disappointments of routinely stunted, marginal lives.

Russell Banks's novels, with their melodramatic intensity and strong narrative drive, show nothing of Carver's tight-lipped, slangy style. But Carver's example may have liberated Banks to deal directly with his own blue-collar background. Banks began as a metafictional writer who published his first stories with the experimental Fiction Collective. But in recent large books like *Continental Drift* (1985) and *Affliction* (1989), he shifts to a powerful realism that centers, as Carver's work does, on the self-destructiveness of the blue-collar male – "lonely, poor, depressed, alcoholic and violent" – the dreamy man-child who never thinks things through, the perfect loser with a genius for the wrong choice, who's sure that "you can't escape certain awful things in life," whose every attempt to escape is bound to make things worse – to leave his children scarred, his wife bitter, and his own life in shambles. These are people "whose lives . . . were ordinary and, despite the ordinariness, gave them constant trouble."

Yet Banks is also a writer in reaction against the kind of narrow-gauge minimalism that Carver's style unwittingly encouraged but scarcely exemplified. Like the wide-ranging Robert Stone and Don DeLillo (whose fix on the violent blue-collar male is part of his portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra*) Banks is willing to harness his acute perceptions about people to a thriller plot, with elements of murder, suicide, and suspense. In doing so he gives his fatal vision a headlong momentum and connects individual lives to a larger social world, especially in *Continental Drift*. (This book, with its large metaphorical title and topical Haitian counterplot, reminds us not of the minimalist side of Hemingway but of the Caribbean adventurers of *To Have and Have Not*.)

In the end Banks, like the Hemingway of the 1930s, risks sentimentalizing his loser into the "common man," a figure of some special de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cency. But by showing us how distant lives and different worlds converge, Banks's work, like Carver's last stories, suggests that minimalism may finally have run its course in America. Its exhaustion is now encouraging a return to a more expansive, more full-bodied fiction, a fiction in which some larger world surrounds our individual lives, a fiction at once more intricately written, more richly emotional, and more densely political.

New and Recent Books in Political Theory

Order from your bookstore or direct from the publisher. Major credit cards accepted. Call (908) 932-2280

Transaction Publishers
Department PTH2
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ 08903

THE MYTH OF THE NATION AND THE VISION OF REVOLUTION
IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Jacob L. Talmon
With a new introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz
In what may well rank as the finest political and intellectual history of the twentieth century, Talmon explores origins of the schism within European society between totalitarians of Right and Left.
ISBN: 0-88738-844-2 (paper) 643 pp. $24.95

MANNHEIM AND HUNGARIAN MARXISM
Joseph Gabel
This remarkable work situates the great Karl Mannheim in Hungary, especially in pre-war Budapest, with its plethora of revisionist Marxists, anarchists, and intellectuals from a variety of areas who brought radical ideas into the mainstream.
ISBN: 0-88738-377-1 (cloth) 212 pp. $34.95

RESURRECTING MARX
THE ANALYTICAL MARXISTS ON EXPLOITATION, FREEDOM, AND JUSTICE
David Gordon
In this sustained critique of Analytical Marxists, Gordon analyzes their reformulation of the Marxian notion of exploitation, the implication of their rejection of the labor theory of value, their differences over what rights people have, and their arguments for the compatibility of markets with socialism.
ISBN: 0-88738-390-4 (cloth) 160 pp. $29.95
ISBN: 0-88738-878-7 (paper) 160 pp. $16.95

ON MEASURING DEMOCRACY
Alex Inkeles, editor
Few assumptions about characteristics of democratic countries, have been tested, in part, as a consequence of lack of agreement on appropriate measures. Here leading social scientists review their experiences, confront their disagreements, assess the state of the art, and establish a common ground for future work.
ISBN: 0-88738-881-7 (paper) 196 pp. $19.95

GRANDEUR AND TWILIGHT OF RADICAL UNIVERSALISM
Agenes Heller and Ferenc Fehér
This book provides theoretical construction to the extraordinary events of the past several years in Europe and the Soviet Union, and China, attributing much of the problem of totalitarianism to its blind acceptance of a Marxist philosophy of practice.
ISBN: 0-88738-378-5 (cloth) 478 pp. $39.95

transaction publishers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PETER LOEWENBERG

The Uses of Anxiety

Anxiety is the pervasive complaint in the modern world, but it is as ancient as the Bible. It is the most important fact in politics, both democratic and authoritarian, and yet it is the least understood component of decision making. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt on March 4, 1933, in his First Inaugural Address, told the Depression-battered American people that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," he was assuaging their anxiety and assuring them that he knew the danger and its causes, and that he could master and control the anxiety-inducing situation. He offered certainty – a sure hand at the helm of the ship of state – and hope for the future. His behavior exemplified the model of the crisis leader.

In 1895, Freud explained anxiety as transformed libido which was dammed up and expressed as a neurotic symptom. The model is a deflection of somatic sexual excitation and its manifestation is anxiety:

> Where one has grounds for regarding the neurosis as an *acquired* one, upon careful examination directed to that end, one finds a series of injuries and influences from *sexual life*.

Freud never entirely abandoned his first theory of anxiety as dammed up libido, and it became enshrined in the ideas of Wilhelm Reich.

By 1926 Freud held that anxiety no longer was transformed libido but a reaction to a signal of danger, unconscious in the adult, of a loss of love, care, security. Anxiety is a signal of the threat of the occurrence of a traumatic situation involving the distressing experiences of helplessness, hopelessness, loss and separation. The danger is the painful recurrence of:

> The longing for the beloved and wished-for person who is absent . . . Anxiety appears as a reaction to the loss of the object . . . It is evident . . . that anxiety cannot be found to have any other function than as a signal for the avoidance of a danger situation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Freud makes the distinction between the loss of object and the loss of the object's love. The latter is the critical determinant of anxiety. "The loss of love is the condition necessary for anxiety."

We are now on the grounds of massive psychic trauma and its *sequelae* in the post-traumatic stress disorders. We have careful and detailed studies of large populations of concentration camp survivors, World War Two, Korean and Vietnam War veterans, Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors, the Buffalo Creek Flood, the Chowchilla schoolbus children, and the victims of hostage-taking, including the Teheran United States Embassy and a Netherlands train kidnapped by Molluccans. The evidence is clear: Given a large enough social or collective traumatic event, no one escapes a post-traumatic stress disorder. Its hallmark is a fixation on the trauma but with new variations and with an altered conception of the self and of the world. The symptoms are lifelong. No one is immune. Adaptive and coping capacities are enfeebled.

This is the crucial bridge to history. We are no longer speaking of singular cases or a unique psychogenesis. Our history as humans is the story of large-scale traumas of war, disease and epidemics, famine, dislocation and migration, economic crises, droughts and pestilence. Trauma is the theoretical link from individual to group, cohort, population, nation, the world. And here the historian appropriately introduces his categories for understanding groups and institutions, politics, national boundaries, educational systems, military service, youth movements, traditions, civic culture, myth, symbol, the artifacts of popular and high culture.

The Protestant Reformation of the early sixteenth century was a trauma of major proportions, a significant rupture in the stability of Western Christendom, whose effect took centuries to work out to a new and secure equilibrium. One response of European religion, culture, and politics to these traumata was a new piety, flagellation, widespread practice of torture, and epidemics of demonic possession, which seized groups in the late fifteenth century for the first time. In this period we see the emergence of the witch mania that tortured and killed thousands. In one year the Bishop of Wurzburg killed nine hundred, the Bishop of Bamberg over six hundred; in Savoy eight hundred were burned in a festival. In 1514 three hundred were executed in the small Diocese of Como.

We tend to forget that Max Weber's great thesis, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), was in essence propelled by the *psychological* dynamic of anxiety. Weber saw and delineated among Calvinists an "ideal type," a characteristic pattern of social and economic behavior of restless activity, continuous work, an acquisitive manner of life combined with a personally ascetic tendency. As Weber noted of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Puritan: "He gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well." This restless economic activity is driven by theological anxiety – by the anxious search for signs of election:

> The tremendous internal pressure under which the sect member in his conduct was constantly held . . . His whole social existence in the here and now depended upon his 'proving' himself . . . The capitalist success of a sect brother, if legally attained, was proof of his worth and of his state of grace. . . .

Weber's model was grounded in an understanding of the dynamics of guilt and anxiety and the function of action as an antidote to anxiety to make entrepreneurial capitalism combined with inner worldly asceticism one of the driving forces of Western history.

The bicentenary of the French Revolution invites us to view that momentous event in the light of the management of anxiety. One of the outstanding works engaging with an historical manifestation of anxiety in the Revolution is George Lefebvre's *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (1932). The "great fear" refers to a general feeling of anxiety which swept areas of rural France in the second half of July and early August of 1789. At this time the countryside joined the towns in revolution. Revolt broke out in rural areas.

These events were historic for France and for the Western world. This was when the peasants were freed of feudal holdovers. This social event, more than any other, made the Revolution a lasting imprint on the political life of France and insured the rural base for republicanism in the long run of French history: the Revolution gave the peasantry their land, and on August 4, 1789, the National Assembly abolished feudal privileges, rights, and titles for all time in Western Europe. As Lefebvre describes the rising of the peasants against the feudal lords:

> In the woodlands of Normandy, in the Hainaut and Upper Alsace, chateaux or abbeys were attacked by those seeking to burn archives and force surrender of manorial rights. In Franche-Comte and the Maconnais peasants set fire to many chateaux, sometimes laying them waste. The bourgeoisie was not always spared: they, too, had to pay. In Alsace the Jews suffered.

He analyzes the fear as a "defensive reaction" against an "aristocratic plot" that did not yet exist. The two were inseparable elements. The fear was of "brigands" in the service of undefined hostile forces who were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

believed to be stalking the countryside, burning, pillaging, and raping. It was a delusion, a symbolic representation, and a projection. Says Lefebvre: "Anxiety is self-explanatory. One has everything to fear from an adversary as one imagines him to be."

The characteristic response of a village to the arrival of the news was panic:

> Mass hysteria would break out among the peasant women: in their imagination, it was already too late – they were raped, then murdered, their children slaughtered, their homes burnt to the ground; weeping and wailing, they fled into the woods and fields, a few provisions and bits of clothing clutched to their bosoms. Sometimes, the men followed close behind once they had buried anything of value and set the animals loose in the open country. Most often, though, whether through common decency, a genuine bravery or fear of authority, they responded to the appeal of the *syndic*, the *curé* or the *seigneur*. Preparations would be made for the defense of the village under the direction of the *seigneur* himself or some old soldier. Everyone armed up at the entrance of the village or at the bridge; scouting parties were sent out. At nightfall patrols were kept up and everyone stayed on the alert. In the towns, there was a sort of general mobilization: it was like being in a city under siege. Provisions were requisitioned, gunpowder and munitions collected, the ramparts repaired, and the artillery placed in position.

When nothing materialized they went off to castle or abbey to assert new rights. A comparison with those areas of France that did not experience the Great Fear is instructive. Some areas, such as Brittany, were immune to the Great Fear. The crucial variable is that the authorities were able to assert their control and exercised a calming influence on the population. In Brittany the local councils took competent measures to restrain both the aristocracy and the lower orders, acting in a confidence-inspiring way, thus giving the people a sense of order and control. As a social-psychological phenomenon the Great Fear is a manifestation of the anxiety caused by loss of authority, the absence of the security of control and mastery, of not having a firm hand at the helm. After the upheaval in Paris on July 14th, the old order was perceived as gone, and the peasantry, in those areas subject to the Great Fear, was adrift with no social order and therefore subject to its own unrestrained wishes and fears.

The news of the purported coming of the brigands, sometimes from all directions at once, traveled with great speed. Lefebvre documents the velocity of the rumor as it traveled day and night:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> To travel from Clermont in Beauvaisis to the Seine – a distance of about fifty kilometers – it took twelve hours of daylight; it traveled the five hundred kilometers from Ruffec to Lourdes in nine days; its speed here was lesser by a half, but it obviously moved more slowly at night. During the day, it seems to have gone at about four kilometers an hour. It moved from Livron to Arles – a hundred and fifty kilometers – in forty hours, which makes four kilometers an hour, night and day.
>
> La Tour-du-Pin got its warning on the 27th at three o'clock, Bourgoin at five o'clock, Virieu, the Bievre plain and the Cote-Saint-André all the same time. The fear rushed down all the valleys of the Bas-Dauphine towards the Rhone valley, from Lyons to Saint-Vallier. Towards the South, it went by the Voiron road to reach the Isere at Moirans, and whilst it went up one side to reach Grenoble by eleven o'clock, it went down the other side to pass through Saint-Marcellin at midnight; it was in Romans at three in the morning on the 28th, moving from here to Tain, then Valence: it was now well established and on that same day the chateaux of the lower Dauphine began to burn.

The motive was revenge. The peasants not only destroyed the archives. "It was," writes Lefebvre, "the desire to punish the *seigneur* through the goods which were so precious to him and which were the symbol and the basis of his power." Such an expression of vengeance will in turn give rise to feelings of guilt, anxiety, and fears of retaliation. As Lefebvre put it, "fear walked abroad," there was a "general feeling of anxiety." He observed that "fear of brigands and fear of aristocrats always managed to occur simultaneously in the mind of the people." He is explicit that this fear was a delusion: "To admit that the brigands existed and might appear at any moment was one thing; to imagine that they were actually there was another."

Recently, Peter Paret suggested that *The Great Fear of 1789* "would not have been significantly improved by its author's comprehension of psychoanalysis." I would argue that an understanding of the sudden collapse of order, the projection of aggressive intent and talion fears of revenge and retaliation are precisely the dynamic concepts that are missing from Lefebvre's classic account. There is an oedipal element in the peasants' overthrow of the seigneurial paternal authority and the fear of the vengeful return of that authority. The peasants feared that the aristocrats were going to do to them exactly what they had already done or were about to do to the nobility in late July and early August 1789.

The time of this anxiety is crucial. The harvests of the previous two years had been especially poor. "At the end of July," says Lefebvre, "the general feeling of insecurity was so much more frightening than it had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ever been before, and on the eve of the harvest there was a truly overwhelming sensation of fear and anxiety." A psychodynamic understanding of guilt, anxiety, and the defense mechanisms of projection and displacement is what is missing from Lefebvre's analysis, and this would explain why the peasants had this great fear of retribution just as they were planning to seize, or already had seized, the manor houses, burned the records, abused and intimidated the lord of the manor into either fleeing or signing over his seigneurial rights. The peasants feared that the "brigands" as agents of the nobility would do to them what they were about to do to the aristocrats: burn, pillage, steal, drive out, and seize for themselves.

Adolf Hitler was a charismatic leader, not merely in the colloquial sense of having a persuasive style and a devoted following, as might be said of Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, or a rock star. We may use the term "charismatic authority" for Hitler in its precise Weberian meaning, as a personal authority which:

> . . . knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission.

Hitler communicated power, certainty, control, an easy explanation for how Germany arrived at its current predicament and an action-oriented program for the future. He offered security, a sense of community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), comradeship, and the promise of national strength and order in place of impotence and chaos. He appealed to all the psychic needs of those Germans who felt desperate hopelessness and futile rage at an abstract economic system and a humiliating peace. As Martin Broszat put it:

> Given the impression of resoluteness which he conveyed, Hitler knew how to articulate and, as it were, to celebrate what his listeners half-consciously desired and felt. He voiced what they secretly thought and wanted, reinforced their still unsure longings and prejudices, and thereby created for them deeply satisfying self-awareness and the feeling of being privy to a new truth and certainty. Such leadership and oratory did not require a refined intellectual discrimination or a calm, mature individuality and personality, but . . . a psychological and mental disposition which was itself so infected by the mood of crisis and panic of the time that it instinctively sounded the correct note.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Heinz Kohut's concept of narcissistic rage distinguishes this form of rage from others, as:

> . . . the need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply-anchored, unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of these aims, which gives no rest to those who have suffered a narcissistic injury. . . .

As with Freud's advanced theory of anxiety, I suggest that this Kohutian formulation has an application to politics and history which is as relevant as its individual clinical use. Less than fifty years after the defeat of France and the triumphant creation of the Second German Reich as the dominant military power in Europe, Germany experienced what was perceived as the shameful humiliation of defeat, dismemberment, guilt, ostracism from the community of nations, and the imposition of reparations for what was then the bloodiest war in history. The emotional program of National Socialism was narcissistic revenge on the Allies who had humbled Germany and imposed the "War Guilt" clause, Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty of 1919. The perceived injustice of the internationalization of Danzig, the Polish corridor, the loss of the Saarland, and the payment of reparations were to be righted by remilitarization, threats, power, and, if necessary, coercion.

Justice Holmes once said, "We live by symbols." This is especially true of crisis politics and the search for stability. D. W. Winnicott defined the transitional space between mother and child as the arena of first symbolization and creativity. The symbolic codes of German politics constituted transitional objects which gave security against anxiety in a world of chaos where the multiple traumas of defeat, inflation, depression, and a weak Weimar government meant uncertainty, instability, and lack of continuity.

An example of the importance of Hitler and the emotional charge of his message as a symbolic transitional object, in distinction to its cognitive content, is the experience described by two sisters in 1934 upon hearing Hitler for the first time at a rally in Kassel. The sisters' family name was Heder, from Kreis Fritzlar; their ages were nineteen and twenty-one; their father had been killed on the Russian front in 1915:

> As the first sonorous and warm words sounded, deep silence befell the place. Never again in life did an event exert such a deep hold on us, as did this first speech of the Führer. And then the words fell, destroying, accusing, blazing and rousing, pulling everyone along including those who were doubtful. He spoke with force to the mass and yet again to each individual, and he fascinated them. His fateful words engraved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> themselves deeply into our hearts. Again and again the enthusiasm interrupted the silence and transmitted itself to the thousands who listened outside the tent to the broadcast. Then it was over. The Horst-Wessel song reared to the sky. We saw flowers over flowers, but the man in the unpretentious brown uniform with a face marked by an inflexible will, with small eloquent hands wasn't there any more. We don't know how we got home. This evening we could not sleep; the experience was still too strong. Many a prayer ascended to heaven on this evening asking for the protection of the Führer.

The sisters were so elated on their first encounter with their new savior/father/leader that they could not sleep. They prayed for him.

The imperial colors, black-white-red, the image of Bismarck and the implied continuity with his Reich and its splendid triumph over France, the figure of the Junker Generalfeldmarshal Paul von Hindenburg as the President who called Hitler to power, are positive symbolic codes of continuity with cherished ideals, security, and success. The images of the "November Criminals" and "Dolchstoss" (stab-in-the-back) referring to those accused of betraying Germany in World War One, the "Jude" and "Sozi-Bonzen" (Socialist Bosses) who were Germany's "misfortune" symbolized the negative images to be obliterated and mercilessly overcome. Hitler's 1932 telegram to five Nazi SA murderers in Potempa, Silesia, in which he congratulated the killers for hacking and kicking a communist organizer to death, was to demonstrate publicly his brutality, ruthlessness, and contempt for normative rules of political conduct. His wire to them read: "I feel myself bound to you in limitless loyalty. From this moment your liberation is a question of honor." Further examples of his trampling upon the normative values of German and Western conduct and culture were the burning of the books and the banning of "degenerate" art. He projected an image of barbaric, irresistible power and an extraordinary capacity for aggressive violence independent of moral norms. The message was that opposition was pointless and hopeless. Resistance was futile.

Adolf Hitler promised decisive action, certainty, power, and mastery of the world. These are the best antidotes to feelings of helplessness, bewilderment, weakness, passivity, humiliation, and vulnerability. Hitler and Nazism were Germany's answer to collective historical narcissistic injury. He gave an integrated, simple explanation of the past, the crisis of 1929-1933, and a vision of a glorious future. Hitler became an idealized parental figure. He appeared to contain anxiety and threats of hopelessness. He posed as the representative of order, morality, and power. He restored an active sense of purpose so the German people could experience society as stable, vital, disciplined, supportive, and dependable. Hitler

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

posited a regime of unity at home, a new respect in the world, dynamic energy, and the end of disorder in the streets and the government.

A dramatic, yet little known, case of the use of a highly emotive national symbol as an antidote to realistic anxiety is the Swiss crisis of the summer of 1940. With the capitulation of France on June 17, 1940, Switzerland was surrounded on all four borders by the Axis powers. Hitler's ground forces were engaged in neither East nor West; therefore, it was a time of extreme danger for Switzerland. The President of Switzerland, Marcel Pilet-Golaz, gave a Petainist radio address on June 25th, suggesting that Europe was under a New Order, Switzerland must adapt to the New Europe, and "that the people should follow the government of a sure and devoted leader [Führer], who will not always be able to explain, elaborate, and give the reasons for his decisions." The army was to be partially demobilized, as though the threat to Switzerland had been from France. Pilet-Golaz said not a word about resisting aggression.

However, not all Swiss were in concord with a mood of collaboration with Hitler. A group of army officers were resolved not to surrender to Nazism and to fight it out to the end. General Henri Guisan called a secret meeting of all commanding officers, from corps commanders down to battalion commanders, a total of six hundred-fifty men, on July 25th. They boarded a lake steamer on the Lake of the Four Cantons and were taken to the meadow of Rütli, a site shrouded in myth and sentiment in Swiss culture. Here in 1291 the three forest cantons had pledged to each other an oath of perpetual mutual defense out of which modern Switzerland was born. This meadow is a place hallowed by Swiss history and tradition and known to all school children. The term *Eidgenossenschaft* is the Swiss German expression for the federal union, synonymous with "Switzerland" in official usage, and Rütli is synonymous with Swiss patriotism and freedom. General Guisan's reflections on his choice of site is telling:

> I wanted to speak with them personally, eyeball to eyeball, as soldier to soldier. I could have done it in any place or on another meadow, at Morgarten or perhaps at Sempach (sites of victorious battles against the Austrians in 1315 and 1386 respectively), but no, it had to occur here, on the meadow at Rütli, in the cradle of our independence, on the soil that must conjure up so much in the spiritual vision of everyone. I was convinced that there everyone would understand me better than in any other place.

General Guisan gave a short informal speech from penciled notes evoking the theme of centuries-old Swiss independence and pledging

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"that it will be respected to the end." He urged the Swiss not to listen to those who spread despair and defeatism. He stressed the need for the army being at its post rather than demobilizing. He was ordering the army to new fortified positions, the Alpine *reduit nationale* on August 1st, the national holiday commemorating the Oath at Rütli in 1291. According to a later official handout, General Guisan said:

> In 1939 the Federal Council entrusted the army with the task of protecting our centuries-old independence.
>
> This independence has been respected, until now, by our neighbors, and we will see to it that it will be respected to the end. As long as in Europe millions stand under arms, and as long as important forces are able to attack us at any time, the army has to remain at its post.
>
> Come what may ["coute que coute"], the fortifications you have built preserve all their value. Our efforts have not been in vain, since we still hold our destiny in our own hands. Don't listen to those who, out of ignorance or evil intention, spread negative news and doubt. Let us trust not only in our right but also in our strength, which enables us, if everybody is possessed of an iron will, to defend ourselves successfully.
>
> On August 1st you will fully realize that the new positions that I have ordered you to occupy are those in which your arms and your courage in the new situation will be most effective for the defense and the good of the country.

An extract of Guisan's speech was handed out as an Order of the Day to be read to the troops. It was also in the press and on the radio. The effect on Swiss morale was electrifying. The German and Italian reaction was a *demarche* of protest notes in Bern on August 13, 1940, in which the Axis powers objected to the Rütli speech and viewed it as "renewed agitation of Swiss public opinion against Germany and Italy." The Reich took notice of it "with deep estrangement." General Guisan could not have chosen a more evocative place to issue his call to the Swiss people that the army should not demobilize, but must remain at its post to resist Axis aggression. We may concur with the evaluation of Guisan's biographer, Willi Gautschi:

> It is no exaggeration to say that a sort of Rütli miracle occurred. A magic effect went out from Rütli. The speech of the General led to the *fundamental change* in the inner posture of a large part of the army and the people: in place of defeatism and resignation a quiet and fanatic *determination* set in to meet, come what may, an ever-so superior attacker and, if necessary, to sell their own skin as costly as possible. The speech at Rütli has with justice become a concept of a his-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

torical turning point.

In what was a paradigm case of symbolic politics, Guisan effectively drew on associations of the stubborn defense of liberty at a time of equivocation and grave crisis.

The war in the Pacific was not going well for the United States in 1942 and early 1943. America suffered a series of setbacks and defeats at the hands of the Japanese, who showed themselves to be a courageous and determined enemy. The Japanese tide of conquest was at its height in mid-1943.

Two major episodes of anxiety in history occurred in our own country, on the West coast, during World War Two. I refer to the relocation of Japanese-Americans in camps in 1942 and the anti-Latino Zoot-Suit Riots of 1943. The Japanese relocations in camps was unfounded in reality and irrational on the face of it. It was not based in reality because there was not a single demonstrated case of espionage by a Japanese American. It was irrational because the relatively large Japanese Nisei and Sansei populations of the exposed Hawaiian Islands were *not* interned. As one who watched these relocations in San Francisco as an eight-year-old boy, it is personally gratifying to me that the United States Congress has recognized the injustice of this impulsive act of anxiety and is now making symbolic restitution for this gross violation of the civil liberties of Americans.

The Zoot Suit Riots of Los Angeles in the first ten days of June, 1943, were attacks on young Latino males who wore a distinctive black suit with a long jacket and pegged pants; a floppy hat and chains often rounded out the accessories. Servicemen from all over America were in Southern California for basic training where they had their heads shaved, their civilian clothes taken away to be replaced by government issue. The GIs and Navy recruits, aware that they were given perfunctory combat training in boot camp to be rushed out to the Pacific theater to meet a determined and lethal brown-skinned foe, rioted and victimized the local Latino youth.

In June of 1943, a Los Angeles newspaper published "Directions on How to 'De-zoot' a Boy":

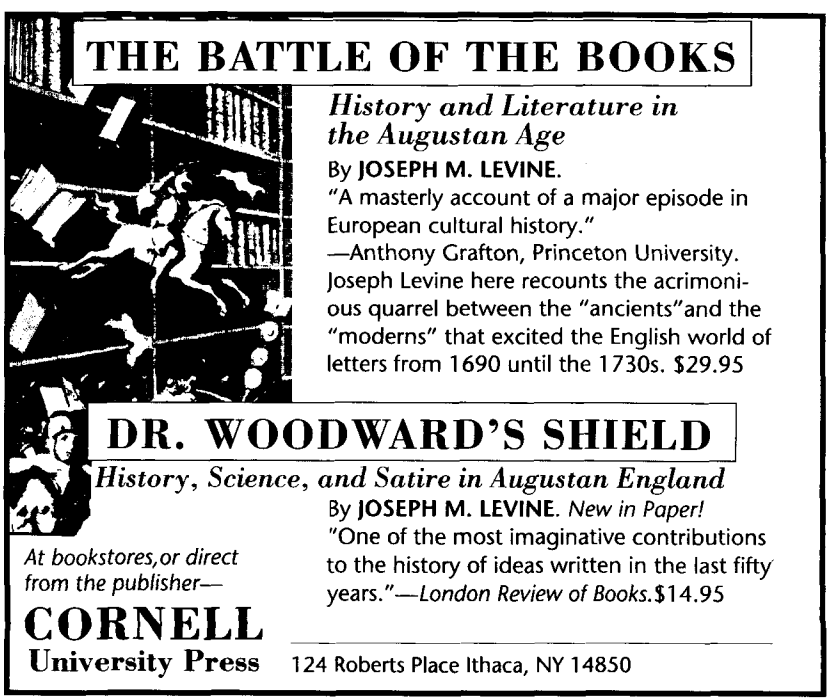
> Grab a zooter. Take off his pants and frock coat and tear them up or burn them. Trim the "Argentine duck's tail" that goes with the screwy costume.

In chasing, capturing, and degrading "pachucos," in unmanning them by taking off their clothes and "duck-butt" hair, the GIs turned the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

passive experience of humiliation and identity loss of boot camp into the active one of beating local Latino youngsters, shaving their heads and taking away their clothes. The available brown-skinned "enemy" assuaged their anxiety over the more remote and dangerous enemy waiting for them in the Pacific.

The politics of anxiety frequently produces an unreasoning impulse to find a quick solution that soothes the immediate anxiety, but often fails to solve the long-term problem. The historical understanding of anxiety is that it is a response to a sense of powerlessness, a loss of mooring or centering. The experiences of an epidemic, a lost war, an old order destroyed, family savings and security wiped out, and strife in previously safe streets, are the social equivalents of the death of a parent or loved one, divorce, loss of a job, or a catastrophic diagnosis. Such crises are the "danger point" creating anxiety, and the overpowering urge is to do something, to impulsively attack an available and vulnerable target, to act aggressively and violently in ways that seem at the moment to meliorate the painful anxiety. The danger is the regressive need to find and follow the leader who gives reassurance with simplistic, often projective and xenophobic, formulae that promise stability, order, and reckonability, power, mastery, and false security.


THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS
History and Literature in the Augustan Age
By JOSEPH M. LEVINE.
"A masterly account of a major episode in European cultural history."
—Anthony Grafton, Princeton University.
Joseph Levine here recounts the acrimonious quarrel between the "ancients"and the "moderns" that excited the English world of letters from 1690 until the 1730s. $29.95
DR. WOODWARD'S SHIELD
History, Science, and Satire in Augustan England
By JOSEPH M. LEVINE. New in Paper!
"One of the most imaginative contributions to the history of ideas written in the last fifty years."—London Review of Books.$14.95
At bookstores,or direct from the publisher—
CORNELL
University Press
124 Roberts Place Ithaca, NY 14850

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAPHNE MERKIN

The Talking Cure Blues

It is difficult, for those of us who have grown up in the last half-century, to imagine a world unpermeated with Freudian ideas – with the free and easy use of such terms as "unconscious," "oral," and, of course, the famous "oedipal complex." Even at its most diluted, or parodied (as in the overused "Freudian slip"), the Viennese neurologist's daring reconception of human struggle as essentially interior – rather than exterior – in nature has entered the culture and forever transformed the way we look at ourselves in the world. Accordingly, the "once upon a time" of our lives has become very much a matter of psychological, rather than behavioral, imagery. Where once we envisioned personality as an actively plotted construct, replete with the heraldic slaying of dragons, we no longer think of character as unfolding from triumphant or tragic encounters with purely outward circumstances. Our plots have burrowed inwards: Will the tender Ego withstand the onslaughts of the punitive Superego? Will the wily Id evade them both? What we have come to understand, for better or worse, is that the dragons which assail us are in our minds.

I say "for better or worse," but of course, with the exception of the British who have held this new mongrel of a science in healthy contempt right from the start, we have all along taken it for granted that Freud's complex, highly abstract rendering of the forces which impinge on human existence is, in some simple sense, a good thing. But, one might ask, *is* it? I mean, is it a verifiable improvement on previous ways of apprehending reality? Certainly it provides an intellectually more sophisticated model than earlier theories of character development, which looked to physiological or religious contexts for their organizing principles. Still, as anyone who has ever dipped a toe into psychoanalytic waters knows, there is nothing immediately to recommend it, either. For one thing, its premises (not to mention its solutions) as to the formation of character are frustratingly intangible; as Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, there's no *there* there. Simply to be in therapy or to observe someone else in therapy is to have strong cause to wonder: *What does personality change look like?* How do you know when it's occurred? And is it worth several thousand dollars every month? For another, if it is consolation that one is after (and I would wager that after a long day

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this is precisely what most of us are looking for), the Freudian embrace is hardly a cuddly one.

The notion of ourselves as starting clean, as having entered the world innocent as babes (an image that the Victorians were the last to wholeheartedly embrace), free of "adult" emotions such as anger, envy, and lust, has been banished forever by the radical diorama of psychic development constructed by Freud and his followers. It seems that from the moment we exit the womb our psyches begin inexorably to take shape: We are rapidly evolving, even while still tiny creatures suckling on our mothers' breasts, into beings riddled with conflicts and drives. Given this clouded-over view of our beginnings, the potential for malfunctioning is obviously enormous, and the requirements for proper nurturance – for "good enough" care and feeding – are well-nigh impossible to come by. It is small wonder, then, that the question which haunts our contemporary consciousness skirts the issue of potential resilience all together, concentrating instead on our abject vulnerability to environmental forces beyond our control: Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the most damaged of us all?

This is a question sure to occur to anyone who reads *Father, Don't You See I'm Burning?* (Yale University Press), a recent collection of essays by Leonard Shengold. The book takes an unsparing look at the aggressive forces that are part of the human endowment; its hefty subtitle alone, *Reflections on Sex, Narcissism, Symbolism, and Murder: From Everything to Nothing*, gives an indication of the book's pessimism, its persistently negative orientation. As befits an *echt*, true-blue follower in Freud's footsteps, Shengold's is an essentially tragic vision. The author's focus is on the unavoidable vicissitudes inherent in human development, which include often unbearable frustration over our never entirely relinquished wish for "everything" – "the wish," as he puts it, "to have exclusive possession of both mother and father." Like Alice Miller, the Swiss lay therapist whose heated writings in such books as *Prisoners of Childhood* and *Banished Knowledge* have remolded our notions of child abuse, Shengold seems to suggest that the possibility of profound psychological harm occurring during early childhood is more likely than not.

Shengold, who has written two previous books, *Halo in the Sky* and *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation*, is a practicing psychoanalyst in New York City, and the patients he offers up (composites, to be sure) for clinical scrutiny are a plagued lot, indeed. Their histories range from bad to worse; as adults they yearn for what they can't have and are enraged about what they've been given. (Then again, one hardly expects contented, self-satisfied sorts to submit them-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

selves to the expensive rigors of classical psychoanalysis, to begin with.) Take A., the young woman who appears in the chapter entitled, "The Metaphor of the Mirror": "The girl's initial complaints were of feeling unattractive, selfish, and unworthy. She suffered from suppressed rage and from bouts of sadomasochistically provocative behavior." During her treatment with Shengold, which involves much analysis of both actual and metaphorical mirroring (that is, the various means by which we catch glimpses of the reflected self), A. discovers that the mother she had once thought of as "wonderful" was, in fact, a bad introject – in layman's terms, a wretched nurturer: "a predominantly selfish, angry, irrational person . . . who required complete compliance and admiration from her daughter."

As if this weren't enough, it also emerges that A.'s mother (as is true of most of Shengold's patients' parents) was given to exhibitionistic sexual displays – "fully displaying her vagina and anus," as well as masturbating in front of her daughter. Shengold postulates that in order to ward off "the terrible rage, felt as a magic murderous power" these experiences invoked in her as a young girl, A. turned to "the narcissistic promise" of the mirror. "To be in the bath water with mother, to gaze at her own image in the mirror (like Narcissus), would surely bring back 'everything': the timeless peace of the baby at the breast. . . ." Armed with this reconstructed knowledge of herself, A. goes off to live the life of "common unhappiness" that the unsanguine Freud, faced with *his* brood of roilingly unhappy patients, stipulated was the light at the end of the tunnel of "hysterical misery." She marries "a rather passive but loving man," moves to another part of the country, has two children whose upbringing she leaves mostly to "a good motherly housekeeper" (thus, presumably, sparing her children the repetition of the only form of mothering she herself had known) and is successful in her unnamed profession. Her mother remains a sore point. "The introject of her mother . . . still lurked in her mind and could emerge in circumstances that fostered regression (such as her mother's illnesses). . . ." but, given the vagaries of A.'s situation, is handled as well as can be hoped for.

There are other patients in Shengold's account, all suffering from various painful disorders of character which lend themselves to this pyschoanalyst's particular version of What Went Wrong When. In contrast to the general theoretical trend, which has been to place key developmental issues in the oral (dependent) or phallic (oedipal) stages, Shengold focuses on the anal (sadistic) phase – roughly equivalent to the Terrible Twos. The results are predictably woeful, although his insistence on inhabiting an anally-focused interpretive universe can sometimes lead to comical, a-cigar-is-never-a-cigar findings: "Phones were always dialed in the years of F.'s childhood, and thinking about spinning the dial with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fingers elicited his anal erogeneity and impulses toward anal masturbation. . . ." We get to meet the aforementioned F., who is a "swinging bachelor" with "desperately warded-off homosexual impulses"; G., a homosexual, who masturbates while on the telephone and who remembers being frightened by the sight of his mother's "large, 'castrating' genitals"; and R., who suffers from "low self-esteem" in spite of her "aura of self-confidence." (Her analysis reveals – what else? – "intense rage and sadomasochism.") There is also the patient who leads "a life of inhibited, largely sadomasochistic heterosexuality" due to having been seduced as an adolescent by an older woman who made use of his bent knee for orgasmic purposes(!), and yet another, V., who is symbiotically attached to his mother and has violent fantasies about the children he sees on the street. Shengold pronounces with due direness upon all these clamorous visitors to his office; mired in the muck of their respective grim realities, their histories being to sound like so many dark parodies – a *Saturday Night Live* send-up of the "Personals" columns.

Interspersed with the anecdotes of misery and pent-up fury provided by his clinical material, Shengold limns a stark human trajectory – from a state of infantile narcissism ("the mindless everythingness of the womb") to one of adaptive unpleasure ("the something that lies between everything and nothing") to the final "beckoning nothingness" of death. In what seem to me to be some of the book's more satisfying chapters, he turns away from live subjects to literary examples. An assiduous reader and a resourceful critic, Shengold probes the regressive yearnings of King Lear and his painful arrival at self-renunciatory love at the close of Shakespeare's play to demonstrate his notion of the "hostile dependency" we are all born into, as well as the resolutions we can avail ourselves of while stuck in the predicament of living our lives. His dissection of Ibsen's conflicting pulls toward bourgeois caution and passionate abandon as enacted in his last plays, specifically *The Master Builder*, is illuminating in a way that his case histories often are not. Perhaps this is due to some innate theoretical bent in the author himself which makes him a better (that is, less reductionist) reader of texts than of people, or perhaps it is no more than that the tragic note is more sonorous when struck in literary masterpieces than when sounded in an office on the Upper East Side – where it too often turns to bleak music, and the unpaid listener is likely to turn a deaf ear.

★ ★ ★

I went to see Dr. Shengold not long ago, on a rainy Friday morning, to talk with him about his book and the current state of the psychoanalytic art. My appointment was for ten o'clock, and the doctor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had made it clear on the phone that he was alloting me a spare therapeutic hour. Was I expecting to meet a man as grave as his pronouncements, adrift in the tormented *Weltanschauung* he perceived in those who came to him for help? If so, I am proven wrong. From behind his cluttered desk in a small office, the bearded and bespectacled analyst seems surprisingly matter-of-fact, even perky. It occurrs to me more than once in my conversation with Shengold that doing this kind of work requires a thickened skin. Too much detachment, and you won't understand the emotional lower depths; too much empathy, and what use are you, wailing along with your patients that indeed your parents did you wrong and that there's no hope for the future?

Shengold readily admits that *Father, Don't You See I'm Burning?*, concentrating as it does on "the inherent primal discontents" of our existence, presents a "skewed point of view." "I think," he says, "this last book is a particularly gloomy book." He goes on to reveal that he's had "many complaints" about it from early readers, including friends and family. I am somewhat relieved to find that the book's unremitting *miséricorde* has struck others beside myself and that their instinct, like mine, has been to resist it. Still, Shengold maintains that this darkness of tone is the very nature of the beast, that "therapy contains unpleasant truths that people don't want to hear about." As a prime example, he points to child abuse, which, he says, with a poetic turn of phrase, "disturbs the peace of the world."

I mention to the analyst that I have been struck by his copious extradisciplinary reading; even when not explicitly about literary texts, his essays are full of the sort of determinedly bibliophilic analogies one doesn't ordinarily expect to find in psychoanalytical works. Shengold attributes his bookish bent to the influence of Lionel Trilling, whose classes he took at Columbia. He believes that Freud's insights are "deeper than what anyone else has come along with," yet he is quick to concede that "analysis isn't the treatment for everybody." I find myself wondering out loud why it is that often the people one would think would benefit from it most are least likely to be found partaking of "the talking cure" (as Freud called it), and Shengold suggests that both the "too well" and the "too sick" are unlikely to turn up on his doorstep. Paradoxically enough, you need a certain amount of health to undergo this treatment, as well as a degree of acknowledged internal distress; in other words, those who are "too defended" – who have constructed enough armor around their problems not to feel discomfited by them – are less likely to be motivated.

Interestingly, psychic health, from an analyst's point of view, is not the same thing as adaptive behavior, from the layman's point of view. ("Health," the author remarks in a footnote, "is even harder than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pathology to account for.") It appears to be, finally, a more arbitrary call for most of us than one would have thought. To wit, given a requisite level of functioning, you are less likely to seek – or to be viewed as needing – psychiatric help the more you can get the world to fit around your particular set of needs. If you're Howard Hughes, for instance, and can afford the upkeep on your phobias, you're in luck. I ask Shengold for a baseline definition of psychological normalcy: "No life," he points out, "is free of shadow . . . It's enough," he says, "to feel 'I'm worthwhile' alongside 'I'm no good.' "

And what about that ameliorative phrase coined by the British psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott – "good enough mothering" – Shengold keeps coming back to in his book, that all-important precondition which serves as a buffer against the slings and arrows of fortune? About its relevance Shengold leaves no doubt – "It's the most important aspect of psychic health, it provides the foundation." I am curious to know what precisely this critical nurturing consists of and how you know if the mother you've had is a Mommy Dearest or a Mommy Good Enough. Shengold obligingly explains that it hinges mostly on a basic feeling of self-acceptance, that "it's all right to be you." (Perhaps it can't be helped, but I wonder why there comes a point at which even the most abstruse of analysts begins to sprout psychobabble of the "How to Be Your Own Best Friend" pop-culture variety.) As to *good enough*, what that seems to translate into is, "I'm loved by my mother, by and large." Since even the rosiest of maternal scenarios includes, according to Shengold, an inevitable falling-off (from what he describes as "the postulated primal bliss at the breast"), I deduce that, had there been a mother in the Garden of Eden, she too would have had her bad moments.

Still, the feeling that one has been insufficiently loved is so prevalent in our culture that Shengold confides he has written a paper about patients who misconstrue their childhoods as emotionally deprived – based on their reading of Alice Miller, etc. – when their parents have actually been *too* indulgent. This strikes me as an interesting development – due, undoubtedly, to a tendency in our culture to dilute complex ideas in the interest of popularizing them, only to then misappropriate them. This phenomenon is also traceable, I can't help thinking, to the very laxness of meaning embodied in a term – corralled by Shengold himself – such as "soul murder."

What remains unaddressed are the very real therapeutic issues of neglect or abuse -- those patients for whom a sense of being damaged is appropriate rather than manufactured. I press Shengold: What if one didn't, in fact, get the requisite "loving care" without which separation becomes fraught with difficulty? Where does this leave one? Immured

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind the high, unbreachable walls of a less-than-good-enough childhood? "Everyone wants everything," the doctor behind his desk says solemnly. "The wish to murder can make one despair. It's hard to be good, to love. Rousseau was wrong." And what about those who *are* motivated to seek therapy, what lies in wait for them? Is there any alchemy – any far-off horizon of self-transformation – at the other side of the couch? From behind his desk, the analyst suddenly strikes me as sphinx-like, almost oracular: "As an adult," he allows, "you're no longer helpless. The fullness of the culture can rescue us from the damage of early life." As our session winds up Shengold holds out disconcertingly modest prospects, for both doctor and patient: "It's a long, slow battle, and some people can't bear to face up. All the doctor can do," he adds, "is suspend disbelief."

I make my way out of the lobby, past the doormen, on to Park Avenue in the '90s. It is a gray day, and the few people who are out in the street rush by under the shelter of their umbrellas. After so much speculation about interiority – conflicts that can't be seen so much as intuited, drives that are adduced by way of behavior – I am struck anew by the immutable *externalness* of the world, even at its dingiest. The sky hangs up above, as it always has, and the ground lies beneath my feet. As I walk along the avenue, past the whir and hum of traffic, I try and shake off a heavy feeling, a lingering sense of claustrophobia. And then I am suddenly taken by an irrepressible urge to run in the rain – that wily Id acting up, no doubt – and I go bounding down the block, away from intrapsychic shadows into the grainy light of the morning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Drawing used to be a touchstone of an artist's achievement, so much so that evidence of being able to draw accurately from nature somehow conferred extraordinary license. When my parents and their friends used to debate the merits of the Abstract Expressionists, I recall their usually finding them wanting because they failed to demonstrate any traditional skills. "Now Picasso," one of the group always said at some point, "Picasso may take enormous liberties, but he can *draw*." (A well-known leftist writer, the speaker had been a foreign correspondent in the heady years between the two world wars and returned regularly to Europe for extended stays, so he had authority in these matters.)

Was this a last gasp of traditional Academic values? If so, a decade or so later, they had fallen by the wayside, certainly in art schools, which may account for the peculiarities of much present-day figurative painting. Eric Fischl, who was an abstract painter – and a good one – when we met in the 1970s, says that life drawing just wasn't "cool" when he was a student at Cal Arts. When he began to feel an urgent need to use recognizable images in his work, he was obliged to teach himself how; the schematic fish, rowboats, and profile portraits that populate his earliest figurative works were chosen because they were the only things he felt he *could* draw, at the time.

These days, we are more likely to prize drawings for their intimacy, for what they reveal about their maker, than for their fidelity to appearances. Spontaneity and nakedness often count more than accuracy and finish for the modern-day connoisseur with a taste for the suggestive sketch rather than the accomplished set-piece, which is not to say that *tours de force* like the Van Dyck drawings seen at the Morgan Library this spring fail to speak profoundly to us. Quite the opposite. That splendid show was only one of a constellation of exhibitions this past season that allowed us to enjoy drawing in all its aspects, from virtuoso efforts by the masters to economical notations by our contemporaries, from highly developed, finished "public" works to private musings still in the process of evolution.

In March and April, Twining Gallery offered *The Nude: Drawings of the Figure by New York School Artists, c. 1930-1950.* It was a delight, an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unconventional mix of works by the well known, the forgotten, the arcane and the surprising. Milton Avery, John Graham, Gaston Lachaise, and Alfred Maurer were handsomely represented, but so were – more unexpectedly, given the abstract work for which they were known – David Smith, Archile Gorky, and Hans Hofmann. Lee Krasner's work, among others, was testimony to the influence of Hofmann's teaching; Maurice Sterne's Rodin-like nudes bore witness to his years in Europe; Marsden Hartley's robust male figure declared the artist's passion and power. There were drawings by such significant but little exhibited personages as Jan Matulka, who introduced a generation at the Art Students League (including David Smith) to Cubism, and Edgar Levy, another member of Smith's circle and one of the first to grasp what Picasso had to offer. And so on. Part of the fun was a dense hanging and a mix that made the viewer really work at deciding who was who – unless, of course, you cheated and used the checklist.

Twining showed concurrently a group of Dorothy Dehner's sculptures and drawings, to coincide with her miniretrospective at the Baruch College Gallery. (She was included in *The Nude*, as well.) Her monumental *Sanctum with Window II*, 1990-91 dominated because of its powerful architectural references and commanding, clear-headed structure. The weight of Dehner's long experience showed – she's been making serious art for well over sixty years – but the piece had an energy and daring best described as youthful. It is one of Dehner's strongest works to date.

At Baruch, a large selection of her spiky, disturbing drawings entered into a dialogue with a smaller grouping of sculptures, permitting interesting speculations about the meaning of the neutral, rather simplified forms of the bronze and steel sculptures, more explicitly rendered in pen and ink. The earlier drawings, especially, provoked speculations, as well, about the relation of Dehner's work to that of David Smith, to whom she was married for nearly twenty-five years. Crosscurrents were evident in the caged forms and insect-like figures of Dehner's drawings, but the marks of her distinctive personality were also apparent. It's good to see attention being paid to Dehner while she can still enjoy it. She's a gallant lady, a dedicated artist, and, happily for us, a survivor.

At about the same time, in April, Janie C. Lee Gallery, New York, and Kate Ganz Ltd., London, collaborated to produce an even more ambitious and eclectic exhibition than Twining's: *Master Drawings: 1520-1990*. As might be expected, the modernist works – Cézanne and Degas to the present – tended to be on a more consistently high level than the earlier drawings, and among the old masters, "lesser" figures often were represented by far stronger works than their well-known contemporaries; there were exceptions, such as a little Guercino study of four heads, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fresh and vigorous drawing demonstrating both the skill typical of the early seventeenth century and the elegance of the particular painter. The show was installed more or less chronologically, with unexpected juxtapositions all along, revealing unlikely relationships between artists normally segregated by the tidy-mindedness of art history courses. A Sheeler of pristine farm buildings, for example, looked surprisingly close to a rural scene by Boucher, filtered through the geometricizing vision of Cubism. The selection seemed, at times, a little expedient, but the effort was nonetheless impressive and the result worth paying attention to. Ms. Lee's shows have consistently been of a high standard, and this venture, the sort of show a museum rather than an individual dealer (or even a pair of them) might be expected to do, was a welcome addition to the season.

That is not to say that a museum's participation is any guarantee of quality, as the Jasper Johns drawing retrospective at the Whitney made all too clear. I've always found Johns most interesting as a draughtsman, so I went to the show with some expectations. It was bound to be better than his painting retrospective organized by the same institution some years ago, I thought, but alas, the same problems were evident. The fault is, however, not the Whitney's but the artist's. As in the painting exhibition, the earliest works – the slightly perverse, obsessively worked flags, targets, and numbers that first established Johns's reputation – had a presence and conviction that the other work lacked. The choice of images already flat and utterly familiar, so that they are recognized rather than seen, shifts the emphasis, in these early efforts, to the artist's sensual touch. The tension between banal image and rich facture is a large part of what these pictures are about and the source of whatever power they possess. In his next series, Johns turned his attention to three-dimensional objects, either preexisting or of his own manufacture – portraits of his beer can sculptures, for example – and found himself in the realm of relatively conventional depiction. Tone and stroke never seem quite to break free of rendering. They always seem subservient to the nominal subject, and the battle between half-glimpsed iconic allusion and the artist's will that enlivens the earlier work is completely absent.

Johns may have been aware of this, because his next series, the "crosshatches," dispensed with recognizable imagery all together. The subject here is the conventions of drawing: the creation of spatial illusion, but without the depiction of space; the repetition of strokes, but without their attachment to anything identifiable. The crosshatch drawings can be very handsome, but they often lack the punch of those first uncomfortable works. The struggle is gone, replaced by facility and manner. It's kinder not to dwell on Johns's subsequent work, that desperate recycling of earlier images and strategies that turns into self-parody. It's kinder still to ignore his most recent work, seen in unnecessary depth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at Leo Castelli Gallery at the same time as the Whitney's show. In the new Johnses, an amorphous blob, apparently derived from an island map but oddly reminiscent of a Philip Guston profile head, floats among stylish David Hockney-style patterns. If someone had told me that they were Hockney's versions of late Guston, I would have believed it.

Dorsky Gallery's April exhibition, *Stanley Boxer: Forty Years of Drawing*, was, unlike the Johns show, something of a revelation. Boxer's juicy, increasingly uninhibited abstract paintings are well known. He has even shown his meticulously crafted sculpture from time to time. But after a lifetime of virtually compulsive, constant drawing, this was the first time Boxer allowed the full depth and range of this central part of his activity to be seen. It was worth waiting for. The pleasures of individual works and particular series was considerable. Boxer has looked hard at almost anything you can think of and transferred that attention into line and color on paper; at times it seems as if the only way he can come to terms with his world is by drawing it, nailing an image to the page by daubing it with watercolor, carving it out of one sheet and collaging it onto another, piercing its background to leave the image floating in an unnameable space, or simply encapsulating it with a delicate, probing line.

The show was chockablock full of agile nudes, ballplayers, soldiers, and self-portraits; there were horseraces, vegetables, zoo animals, painterly little landscapes, and much more. Sometimes Boxer's sources were evident. Some of the tiny landscapes were Klee-like; some of the sensuous nudes were informed by Bonnard, and a few of the frontal, overscaled animals recalled the confrontational images made by the Innuit printmakers of Cape Dorset, but the strongest impression was that of an intense, unmistakable individual. Boxer is a natural draughtsman with a great deal of natural fluency and facility. (My parents' friends would have loved him.) As the show made clear, he can exploit that fluency or subvert it, with equal success, but even this kind of judgment seems a little beside the point, in the face of forty years' unbridled, vibrant, all-stops-out activity. Such energy and dedication can only command our respect and admiration.

The Drawing Center, which can be relied on to produce tightly focused, imaginative exhibitions of distinction, lived up to its own high standards with *Picasso's "Parade:" from Paper to Stage*. The show examined the evolution of Picasso's celebrated costumes and decor for the legendary ballet, *Parade*, the scandal of the 1917 season of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, on which he collaborated with Jean Cocteau, Erik Satie, and Leonid Massine. A host of sketches and finished drawings documented the development of the streetscape of the set and the poetic, circus-world of the curtain. Most fascinating were the drawings that bore witness to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

changes in Picasso's conception of the Managers' costumes, from simple sandwich boards to elaborate, sculpture-like structures, like Cubist constructions come to life. A sequence of rapid sketches laid bare Picasso's thinking by allowing us to watch the costumes lose their direct references to the body and become more sculptural. (They must have been dreadful to perform in.)

Tantalizing photographs of the original dancers rounded out the show. The only thing missing was the curtain, an apotheosis of Picasso's Rose Period paintings of troupes of acrobats. Unfortunately, it is not only extremely fragile but impossibly large. (When it was shown in New York in much larger quarters, some years ago, I seem to remember that some of it was rolled.) A large color photo of the curtain was made to stand for the original, not the happiest of choices, although the rest of the show was so absorbing that it really didn't matter very much.

The breadth of Picasso's inventions for this single event is remarkable, and the exhaustive catalogue that accompanies the show, by Deborah Menaker Rothschild, addresses this issue by examining the wealth of sources, from the popular culture of the period to the high art of the past, that appear to have found their way into *Parade*. If anything, the catalogue is even more provocative than the exhibit – in terms of shedding light on the project – but the vigor and intimacy of the drawings were justification enough for the show.

An impulse toward drawing, that quality that the French call "graphisme," is at the heart of Robert Motherwell's work, no matter what the medium or technique. In French, the word encompasses the notion of writing, as well as drawing, which seems particularly apt for this master of overscaled, abstract calligraphy. A retrospect of Motherwell's graphics, at Associated American Artists, earlier this year, made this abundantly clear, but it was equally apparent in the works in *Motherwell: From the Studio*, a revealing exhibition seen at M. Knoedler and Company in May and June.

The show was made up of works taken directly from the walls of the painter's Connecticut studio, a range of archetypical images in a great variety of media and sizes, from private studies to imposing canvases, spanning a period of over forty years. The continuity of particular configurations – the now-familiar jostling balls and bars that we call the Elegies, or the geometric, pared-down Opens, for example – was readily visible, but there were less familiar, almost puzzling images, as well. An ambiguous head-shape, now human, now horse-like, seemed equally indebted to Picasso and to Motherwell's own past.

Small pictures with sheets of saturated color, like curtains descending across an enormous proscenium, were monumental, despite their small size. Even in these, which are about as painterly as Motherwell ever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gets, the graphic quality of edges was of paramount importance, more so, perhaps, than color. It's arguable, of course, that Motherwell is not a colorist at all, but a painter who depends wholly on line and shape and placement for impact. Color serves to separate elements, but it isn't used to construct a picture. How crucial this can be is apparent in the rather soft recent versions of the Elegy motif, where the balls and bars seem to have lost their ability to butt up against one another (and against the surface of the picture) aggressively and instead shuffle along, like a line of swollen figures; on the other hand, it is also true that the pale, washy color of these recent works also fails to turn surface into space. Motherwell's latest work has been, to my eye, extremely problematic, so it was especially welcome to see a group of pictures that reminded us once again of his true strengths and his persistence.

A backward look of another sort was afforded by Archie Rand's April showing at Exit Art. Rand's "Letter Paintings" were done about twenty years ago by a brash young artist trying to find out who he was and how he differed from the painters he admired most at the time. (The mature Rand had his first look at the series as a whole in this exhibition.) They are oddly prescient pictures, with their uneasy alliance of contradictory impulses. Rand scrawled the names of his heroes – jazz musicians, artists, poets, writers – across ravishingly inflected expanses of color that, without the childishly printed "messages," would have been accomplished versions of what has come to be known by the infelicitous phrase Color Field painting. In the best, the shaky calligraphy both declares itself and melts into its surroundings, so that you read the texts as a matter of choice and an act of will; conversely, when the "message" remains too distinct from its surroundings, the expanse of color becomes a passive background and the painting becomes an artful, elegant poster.

The Letter Paintings are puzzling, made more impressive by when they were done and by the insight they offer into Rand's subsequent concerns: his probing of the possibilities and limits of visual language. The series, with its questioning of the difference between seeing and reading, could seem self-conscious or even modish, had it been done in 1991, but as a document of Rand's past it has a meaning beyond the evident appeal of lush color, sensitive texture, and tremulous drawing.

Even more perplexing questions about originality and singularity were raised by exhibitions by John Griefen and Walter Darby Bannard, in March. Both artists explore the permutations of all-over, gestural, abstract painting and both hold firm to the notion that a picture that is about its own making can also be charged with its maker's individual history. The obvious comparison that is often made, particularly in the case of Griefen, is with Olitski, the assumption apparently being that any all-over tonal painting that is about the manipulation of material looks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like any other. Olitski has clearly been a profound influence, but what was equally clear from Griefen's exhibit at Salander-O'Reilly is how inadequate the assumption of sameness really is.

The best of Griefen's layered, brushy canvases seem to happen as you look, his gigantic sweeps of paint momentarily coalescing into unstable configurations. His color sense is idiosyncratic, with the most successful pictures often appearing to be colorless, with a murky sheen, almost like fur, not because of their surfaces, which are rather dry, but because of subtle chromatic and tonal shifts. The show was evidently chosen to emphasize the difference between pictures, a good thing, since it forced viewers to concentrate on individual works and, it is hoped, discover their personalities. They should have. This was Griefen's best show to date.

Bannard's show, a survey of his work of the past five years, installed in two parts at the Montclair Art Museum, was also chosen to emphasize the individuality of his pictures. As in Griefen's show, the strategy helped to make clear both the artist's connection to a tradition of modernist painting and his contribution to that tradition. Since 1987, Bannard has been preoccupied by variations on a structure created by scraping layers of transparent color over more opaque color. This may sound predictable, but it isn't. Bannard's images range from the lyrical to the edgy; they can be diaphanous as an Impressionist landscape or crisp as a Cubist still life – which their restricted palette and sharp-edged planes often evoke. Skips and stutters of Bannard's spreading tool make layers of color interchangeable, as does the intensity of color itself, which creates an unexpected spatial pulse at odds with the apparent economy of means. The installation stressed Bannard's gifts as a colorist, making much of the unnameable metallic hues of his recent paintings, some with the elusive glow of old sepia ink, others cool and transparent, and still others heated and audacious. Yes, both Bannard and Griefen adhere to a time-honored (and in the view of some of my colleagues, obsolete) notion of what a painting can be. They're proud to do so, and they help to keep the idea alive and healthy.

Medrie MacPhee, a new young painter with a different relationship to the past, made an impressive New York solo debut at Philippe Daverio Gallery in April. (Previously she had been seen here in a two-person show at 49th Parallel.) MacPhee paints industrial "landscapes," images of those incredibly complex structures you see from the train or the highway, passing through a manufacturing town or a port – those wonderful, skeletal assemblies of girders and tanks and struts whose function you can never quite determine. She is able to turn these enigmatic constructions into haunting "creatures" with distinct personalities (without, I hasten to add, any suggestion of animated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cuteness), rather than making them serve as definers of place. At least, that seems to be her starting point. You can never be sure, in MacPhee's work, just how much is observed and how much is invented, filtered through time, memory, and the history of art.

Space tips and slides, disorienting the viewer and making him concentrate on the artifice of painting, not the reality of New Jersey docklands. MacPhee's paint handling has been getting looser and lusher in the last few years, and the struggle between the delicate, relaxed touches of her brush and her brutal subject matter is an important part of what her new work is about. Her tender color, with its abrasive, acidic top notes, adds to the tension. The result is not a predictable commentary on the unexpected beauty or sensuality of the mechanical, but rather a complex meditation on what it means to aspire to a great tradition of painterly painting from the perspective of a late twentieth-century urbanite. MacPhee is a newcomer to watch with interest.

Among old friends, shows by Helen Frankenthaler and Willard Boepple, both at André Emmerich Gallery in April, raised expectations that were richly met. Frankenthaler was in fine form, flirting with landscape allusions and pulling back at the last minute to a world of floating blocks and streaks of paint and floods of color. Nature informs these paintings, but it is nature translated into purely painterly terms, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say distilled into essences of startling color and seductive surfaces.

Boepple continues to explore his ladder-like image, but saying that tells you little about the inventiveness of his sculpture. The newest works are of pale, sometimes stained wood. The "ladders" are sliced, chopped, and reassembled to make structures that are at once abstract, anthropomorphic, and architectural. They wave and balance, press their limbs closely together and then, when you least expect it, announce themselves as solemn, deadpan enclosures. The largest piece in the show, however, did none of these things, being a giant cascade of chunks and planes that seemed at the same time an homage to Cubism and a genial nose-thumbing at the awe with which Cubism is regarded these days. It's as if Boepple had recaptured, at large scale and in his own vocabulary, the irreverent spirit that turned a scrap of sheet metal into a still life, or some sheets of cardboard and a couple of pieces of string into a guitar. Boepple's seemingly casual spill of blocks and scraps was also authoritative and serious, for all its playfulness.

A final thought. None of these artists were represented in this year's Whitney Biennial. Given the general awfulness of the show – admittedly awfulness of a different kind than any of the previous versions – I would take that omission as a kind of endorsement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FEIWEL KUPFERBERG

The Other Postmodernism

Nothing seems to be further apart, in geography, culture, history, and language than Latin America and Central Europe, which makes the seeming closeness of their literatures even more paradoxical. It is as if characters jump out of novels, travel secretly by night, meet to discuss plots and compositional principles, and together solve the common problems of literary techniques, returning home just before dawn. The following morning they pop up in their writers' heads, communicating what they have learned, keeping the creative dialogue alive in some kind of global network of literary unconscious.

There are, of course, also important differences between the literature of Central Europe and that of Latin America. The predominant mood in a novel by Milan Kundera is one of irony toward the self, built upon a melancholy and suicidal quest for dramatic self-punishment, which Kundera calls *litost*. In the writing of Gabriel García Márquez or Isabel Allende, the individual never has any real choice; there is an aura of Greek tragedy carrying the characters toward their destiny. The Latin Americans do not seem to be able to do without the oracle. Their characters move slowly toward predetermined catastrophe, as if they had all borrowed the cloak of King Oedipus. In Kundera's novels the small, insignificant, sometimes ridiculous things interfere with the life patterns of the characters, shaping their fates into something totally unpredictable: a postcard in *The Joke*, a pair of ugly pants in *Life Is Elsewhere*, a blue pill in *The Farewell Party*. Yet, when the narrator of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* sets out on his voyage of inquiry into the fate of his freely created characters, the reader of Latin American literature is hit by the shock of recognition. He asks himself: If Thomas had lived in Peru and not in Czechoslovakia, would he not be that elusive figure, the martyr and Trotskyist guerilla soldier Comrade Mayta whom Mario Vargas Llosa chases into the Peruvian jungle, always knowing that the government soldiers already have determined his fate?

Isabel Allende's novel *On Love and On Darkness* ends with the female hero crossing the border, leaving her homeland Chile. The whole novel, working against the very strong emotions of this particular moment, suddenly acquires a totally different meaning. The novel is not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what it seemed to be, a thriller and love story. It is an existential drama. The feelings of fear, excitement, and sensuality are self-injected antidotes to the temptations of melodrama, which always makes bad art. The same technique is used by Kundera in *The Farewell Party*. Written in the form of a five-part vaudeville (the only one of his novels in that particular form, the others having followed closely the polyphonic-lyrical form composed of seven parts), it seems to have a clear plot. A famous jazz trumpetist, married to a beautiful former singer, seeks to escape disaster in the form of adulterous fatherhood. Not until very late in the novel does the key scene flutter by. Again, a man is leaving his country. He tells himself that he has no other choice, but he knows he is lying. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the exiting character splits in two. One part of him, the man, stays. The other part, the woman, leaves but later returns, only to drown while trying to escape from Paradise, a children's island where the past is abolished. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the woman returns first; the man follows her, and they both die in a traffic accident.

Kundera's style gives his characters an absolute freedom. They are introduced without warning and vanish without smoke. And they never seem to be prisoners of plot. Often there is no clear plot at all. Time collapses; characters enter and leave as if by their own free will. They live dream-lives. Dreams themselves are part of the characters, defining their worlds just as much as so-called reality does. There is an impulse at work here, a drive towards the fantastic, which seems to grow organically out of the fine thread sewing together the different parts of the novel, making the narrative thick and light at the same time, creating a lyricism filled with magic and beauty.

This same aesthetic can also be found in the surrealism of Carlos Fuentes, the postmodernism of Jorge Luis Borges, and the magical realism of Octavio Paz, Gabriel García Márquez, and Isabel Allende. Expanding the field of vision, we can find a whole "family" or set of families in Central and Eastern Europe that fit rather well into this description: The Serbo-Croation writer Danilo Kiš, the Czech dramatist Vaclav Havel, the Russian novelists and dramatists Andrei Amalrik, Aleksandr Vampilov, and Vasily Aksyonov, the Polish dramatist Slawomir Mrozek. Lately identified as "postmodernist," these Central and East European writers have much less in common with North American and Western European contemporary writers than the term suggests. What is called "postmodernism" today is too broad a term to be meaningful for close textual studies. Postmodernism in the North American and Western European context is basically a revolt against reason as such, fueled by a moral and cultural relativism that has revived the nihilism of the last century but is deprived of faith in the avant garde, which finally died away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the illusions of the Maoist-anarchist new left. Aesthetically, it is sterile, relying on eclecticism and loss of faith in the power of free imagination and creativity. Because of its constant tendency to overpoliticize art, it has come to identify the death of the avant garde with the death of the novel, literature, and art itself. But there are also deeper forces at work here. The transition towards a postindustrial, knowledge-based society has enhanced the role of the "specialist" tremendously, transforming the writer or intellectual into an obsolete and at the same time mythical figure, a voice out of a distant past with no clear contours, a beaten hero, whom a society denying the very existence of the extraordinary finds it hard to recognize. Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe seem to be more fortunate in this respect. Here the writer and the intellectual are still regarded as something of prophets whom one can rely on to tell the inconvenient truths, not only to the leaders but also to the people.

The very function of the aesthetic differs in these diverging contexts. In postindustrial society knowledge is coded into all institutions; all public life becomes rationalized and socialized, and as a consequence our intellectual experience becomes overheated and overloaded. The underside of this is that, paradoxically, our emotional experience becomes decoded. Private, affective life is more varied, rich, and exuberant, but at the same time it is fragmented and deprived of meaning and significance. This leads to the following dilemma: Either art has to be true to itself, that is, to describe reality as it is, fragmentary and without meaning and significance – precisely what postmodernism in this sense does – or art must satisfy the quest for wholeness, meaning, and significance. In the second instance, art ceases to be art and becomes entertainment. It becomes kitsch, art that has betrayed its mission, sentimentalizing reality, presenting a picture that refuses to take life as it is seriously. In Latin American and Central European literature, this split between high art and kitsch seems not to have occurred. The novels of the foremost Latin American writers are loved by mass audiences. Kundera's novels lose nothing in seriousness by being entertaining as well.

The most important difference between the postmodernism of Latin America and Central Europe and that of Western Europe and North America, then, lies elsewhere. If a minimum definition of postmodernism is inter-textuality, a self-conscious attitude toward the text that situates it in relation to tradition, the main difference here lies in the attitudes toward tradition, visible in aesthetic techniques employed. In Western Europe and North America, the predominance of the aesthetic technique of pastiche seems to suggest an attitude of debunking and levelling, more revealing of the holder of such an attitude than of the object held in contempt. Under a shallow arrogance and enforced indifference, it is easy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to recognize Erik Erikson's adolescent rebel in the middle of an identity crisis. Left by himself to find a path of life, he challenges those invisible authorities to come forward and become that other who in otherness defines him.

Latin American and Central European writers are also disrespectful towards tradition, but theirs seems to be a loving disrespect. Where the pastiche-maker seems to be haunted by fears of castration, the Latin American and Central European writer regards his predecessors as natural equals, with whom it is possible to have a lifelong dialogue. Two recent collections of essays, one by Kundera (*The Art of the Novel*), the other by Fuentes (*Myself with Others*), clearly demonstrate how far from neurotic the relationship between literary fathers and sons seems to be in that other postmodernism. Yet reading these essays also makes one aware of how different the political situations of Latin America and Central Europe are and how this influences art. Kundera would never have let go of his artistic self, relieving the purely moralistic self, as Fuentes does in his concluding essay on United States politics in Central America. Kundera's essay on Central Europe is truly a piece of art, which will survive long after the last foreign soldier has left Prague, Budapest, Warsaw, and East Berlin, something one cannot, alas, say of Fuentes's tiresome harpings. Straightening gray folds never produces black and white, in politics or in art.

Coming in

Partisan Review:

- **Norman Mailer:** *from* Harlot's Ghost
- **Octavio Paz:** On Modern Poetry
- **Philippe Raynaud:** Feminism and the *Ancien Régime*
- **Robert Alter:** Vladimir Nabokov
- **George Edwards:** Music and the Politics of Postmodernism
- **Herbert Gold:** A Blazing Incident
- **Rachel Hadas:** Visiting Schools
- **Susan Dunn** and **Robert Dalzell:** Revolutionary Myths

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

Authenticity in "Documentary"

Lewis Jacobs's unique anthology of criticism and reportage, *The Documentary Tradition* (1971), has a phrase attributed to John Grierson, "the creative treatment of actuality," that makes one wonder about that curious adjective "creative," granting as it does a license not only for slickness and propaganda in film but even for lying and self-delusion. I recently saw a string of "documentaries" purportedly about Germany immediately after World War Two. In these late 1940s films, which are filled with optimism about rebuilding the defeated nation with the aid of the Marshall Plan and thus neglectful of such post-World War Two hardships as food rationing, what is really documented, we can safely say forty years later, is the Allied mentality of the time. What is essentially documented in the more familiar example of Leni Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1936) is not Germany in 1935 but the generation of a collective fantasy.

The contrary adjective is "authentic." It follows that a documentarian, as distinct from a propagandist, should make his or her production decisions for reasons of authenticity. In a twenty-one-minute film recently made about pre-World War Two Berlin as represented in the surviving great Jewish cemetery, my partner, Martin Koerber, and I stuck to our theme – the cemetery as an evocation of a lost world – and thereby eschewed a lot of "creative" moves, some of them quite fashionable in documentary filmmaking. If the cemetery now was our subject and visual archaeology our theme, we decided it would be inauthentic for us to show anything else, even pictures of the place at times past.

For the soundtrack, we recorded the voices of Berliners talking about the Weissensee Cemetery and the world represented there. To show these people now would be inauthentic, not only because it would be false to allow them to upstage the cemetery but also because, as these Berliners are talking about themselves at times past, it would be false to show them as they look now. It would be falser to resort to the convention, "fundable" though it might be, of introducing a celebrity-narrator who had nothing at all to do with the subject.

For instance, most *Kristallnacht* documentaries, by focusing upon talking heads, miss the opportunity unique to film to create a kinetic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

image and thus an afterimage. If a purported documentary fails to instill an afterimage of its subject, it is finally not a film but, simply, an illustrated magazine article. (Can anyone remembering a recent, generously funded PBS series about Jewish civilization identify now an image other than Abba Eban talking?)

One further trouble with the convention of the talking head, so popular in film since the advent of television, is that whatever details a visage may have now become more blatant than subtle, more distracting than revelatory. If the speaker has a malformed face, for instance, that aberration falsely affects the viewer's perception of his or her testimony. As the convention of the talking head comes from television, so most films employing it are actually aimed for television. In our time, simply to make a film that looks better on the large screen is to reflect authenticity, or a lack of opportunism, in the use of the medium itself. (It follows that refusing to transfer a film to videotape, or to allow it to be broadcast on television, becomes a sign of filmmaking integrity.)

The footage of our Berlin film has an authenticity filled with details that could never be staged or manipulated (and are, alas, not so visible on a television-sized screen). Since the subjects could not move, the camera perambulates. Near the opening of the film is a panorama down the cemetery's honor row, ending with the gravestone of Rabbi Leo Baeck and his wife; but as the camera turns, it becomes apparent that there is only one grave behind the stone – Baeck himself died in England and is actually buried there. Under the stones of Kurt Tucholsky's parents is only one grave, because the mother's stone, above an empty plot, reveals that she died in a concentration camp. Many other stones state on their faces that their occupants were born someplace else, subtly illustrating the theme that from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1920s Berlin was a magnet for people from the East.

Other gatherings of stones have blank spaces, indicating not only that relatives who were expected to be buried in Berlin actually died someplace else but that expectations for Berlin in general were sabotaged. To answer the question, often asked, of how the cemetery survived the bombing that devastated so much else in Berlin, the film shows majestic trees not only covering a footpath in the Napoleonic fashion but implicitly indicating, as trees so tall are rare in Berlin today, that no bombs hit Weissensee. A few stones from 1942 have the same death date for a man and wife, indicating that they must have committed suicide together. As the film has no narrator, none of these subtleties are explained – not only must such visual details be seen, but conclusions must be drawn from them alone. Thus does documentary art differ from instructional filmmaking.

One move toward authenticity involved the soundtracks. As the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

testimony was drawn from real Berliners, speaking about the cemetery and the world represented there, we felt it would be false to overdub their voices. Since the film already contained an abundance of reading matter in the gravestones, it would also be offensive to fill the screen with yet more words in subtitling. To follow the original German with versions in English, French, Swedish, Spanish and Hebrew, fresh testimony was recorded from Berliners speaking all those languages. From such testimonies a new soundtrack for each of six films, titled respectively: *Ein Verlorenes Berlin*, *A Berlin Lost*, *Berlin Perdu*, *Ett Forlorat Berlin*, *El Berlin Perdido*, and *Berlin Sche-Einena Jother*, was composed. Therefore, even though the Spanish film, say, has verbal content and voices quite different from the others, it is no less authentic than the original German. (There is nothing quite like this in the history of documentary filmmaking. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, by contrast, has within a single context several languages that are subtitled.)

The main difficulty now is that only sophisticated polyglot audiences can begin to appreciate having six different narrations without subtitles. (The glib conclusion, that since the film is about a cemetery in Berlin, it must be about the Holocaust, rather than a symbol of pre-World War Two life had to be overcome.) No wonder the ethics of authenticity have so little presence in contemporary documentary filmmaking. The last time I tried to talk about these issues with a full-time documentarian, a real pro, he wanted to change the subject to fundraising.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STATE OF POETRY

JEFFREY DONALDSON

Must Men Stand By What They Write?

The discernment of a writer's moral liability for those literary artifacts he applies himself to, and a reticent and ironic engagement of such responsibility in his poetry, are characteristic features of Geoffrey Hill's demanding oeuvre. Under the burden of what he variously calls the poet's "empirical guilt," "the tongue's atrocities," "the indecencies of the language" and "its great potential for violence," which subsist as "irredeemable error in the very substance and texture of his craft and pride," the writer discovers his vocation, that of bearing his "peculiar . . . shame in a world growing ever more shameless." In this respect, the jolting line near the end of his recent poem, "The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy," "Take that for your example!" not only serves a smart cuff to the reader's ear, but suggests what has been most characteristic of Hill's own try at a vocation: the remembrance and circumspection of certain historical figures whose exemplary lives both anticipate and reprove our own inadequate efforts, framing the "extent" of their efficacy.

In this recent poem, the death of Charles Péguy, French poet and socialist, on the battlefield of the Marne in the autumn of 1914 is presented as a symbolic gesture of radical expiation for what were feared to be the fateful consequences of a published article (in which, as the poem has it, Péguy writes, "Let us have drums to beat down his great voice"), which may or may not have incited a man to murder the French activist Jean Jaurès. The poem, both "éloge and elegy" (that is, both an appreciation and lament), finds meaning with respect to its own expiatory responsibilities by mirroring Péguy's fall. Hill, however, uses a glass with this difference: it reflects *upon* and partly determines what it mirrors. Such reflections frame certain questions concerning the situation of poetry. Hill quotes in an essay Wallace Stevens's adage that "after one has abandoned a belief in god [sic], poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption." Here too he addresses the problem of poetry's surrogate status, while at the same time raising doubts as to precisely what "place" poetry takes.

"The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy" is an artful patterning and lamentation of Péguy's death. At the same time it presents

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

itself as stopping short of that fall, turning aside towards its own troubled contemplation, and asks the questions: How are we liable (literally tied or bound) to what we have made? What can it have meant for Péguy to "defend your first position to your last word?" And finally, how do we situate ourselves between such fatal defenses and the living demands of the imperfect work at hand?:

> Did Péguy kill Jaurès? Did he incite
> the assassin? Must men stand by what they write
> as by their camp-beds or their weaponry
> or shell-shocked comrades while they sag and cry?

Even as Hill first asks whether such fealty towards what we have made need exist ("Must men stand by what they write?"), he invokes a physical dimension that will determine the relationship throughout the poem. In what way can one be thought to stand by one's work? Is it a physical gesture, as to stand up beside the bed one will lie down in, the weaponry one will use, or one's wounded comrades? The entire passage, bearing on the preposition in "stand by," becomes itself a prepositioning of the question of a writer's responsibilities and the directions in the poem that it will take. The *mise en scène* with which Hill represents Péguy's life and death comprises various landscapes, some real and some imaginary, and he is careful to distinguish them. Péguy cultivates, on the one hand, notions of an ideal country, partly a reactionary vision of "Old France," and partly a dream of a future socialist Utopia:

> Yours is their dream of France, militant-pastoral:
> musky red gillyvors, the wicker bark
> of clematis braided across old brick
> and the slow chain that cranks into the well
> morning and evening.

Hill returns, after Péguy's "fall," to this nostalgic vision:

> There is an ancient landscape of green branches –
> true tempérament de droite, you have your wish –
> crosshatching the twigs and light, goldfinches
> among the peppery lilac, the small fish
> pencilled into the stream. Ah, such a land
> the Ile de France once was.
> [. . .] Iron men who bell the hours,
> marshals of porte-cochère and carriage-drive,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this is indeed the perfection, this is the heart
of the mystère.

The landscape is politicized, becoming the wished-for home of the "true tempérament de droite." The actual Ile de France notwithstanding, this "Ile" is set in isolation, in a nostalgic fictional frame (where life is pencilled into the real), protected by "porte-cochère and carriage-drive" from the external world. Yet in the same place there is another environment, a dimension of reality other than this Utopian vision, an historical world over which Péguy has no dominion:

This world is different, belongs to them –
the lords of limit and of contumely.
. . . . . .
This is your enemies' country which they took
in the small hours an age before you woke . . .
. . . . . .
This is no old Beauce manoir that you keep
but the rue de la Sorbonne, the cramped shop,
its unsold *Cahiers* built like barricades,
its fierce disciples, disciplines and feuds . . .

The place is the same, save that the "Ile" was "taken" while Péguy was in the process of dreaming it. As he wakes into the real world he had been fashioning in his dreams, he finds it changed, alien, discomposed. Hill warns, "such dreams portend." The "old Beauce manoir" becomes a front, a cramped barricaded shop portending war: "here is your true domaine, its fields of discourse ripening to the Marne." Peguy's own fictions of an ideal world and landscape ripen to a field of battle. His Utopian visions become grim realities: "the line//falters, reforms, vanishes into the smoke/ of its own unknowing." The line between fictional and ostensibly real landscapes here is a thin one, so much so that lines of prose, and frontier lines of battle shade together. It is, Hill believes, Péguy's peculiar and exemplary act of atonement that he crosses that line, falls into the landscape he had idealized by "standing by," physically giving himself to the real ground of that envisioned country, which, in his poetry, he had fallen short of:

So you spoke to the blood. So, you have risen
above all that and fallen flat on your face
among the beetroots, where we are constrained
to leave you sleeping and to step aside. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is here that we "contemplate the working/ of the radical soul . . . waking/ into the foreboding of its inheritance/ its landscape and inner domain; images/ of earth and grace." Landscape becomes Péguy's "inheritance" ("Dying, your whole life/ fell into place"), a new inner domain, anticipated by his Utopian "true domaine" and "field of discourse." Thus being "dug from the claggy Beauce and returned to it," Péguy is imagined as dying "happy" for the "terre charnelle," to which he falls, and "in strange Christian hope, [goes] down into the darkness of resurrection," where his assumption continues:

> Woefully battered but not too bloody,
> smeared by fraternal root-crops and at one
> with the fritillary and the veined stone,
> having composed his great work, his small body,
> for the last rites of truth. . . .

The landscape, then, is Péguy's "Mystère," literally the place of his rite, his vigilant "standing by." He atones for his troubled field of discourse by dropping to the field of battle it had become. Yet Hill reminds us that he himself is still standing, "counting his blessings," "empty handed":

> We are 'embusqués,' having no wounds to show
> save from the thorns, ecstatic at such pain.
> Once more the truth advances; and again
> the metaphors of blood begin to flow.

As such who are "constrained/ to leave [Péguy] sleeping and to step aside/ from the fleshed bayonets . . . " we "embusqués" have much to account for. How shall contemplation respond? How might this "stepping aside" and "turning away" become a "standing by?" How might poetry itself keep a vigil? The poem involves Hill's own attempt to "stand by" his work, to embody some expiatory act as his own reflection of Péguy's example.

In "Poetry as Menace and Atonement," Hill borrows a phrase from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who remarks that "the poet behaves with regard to language like an engineer trying to form heavier atoms from lighter ones." He also cites Karl Barth's remark, "Sin is the specific gravity of human nature as such," concluding in turn:

> . . . it is at the heart of this 'heaviness' that poetry must do its atoning work, this heaviness which is simultaneously the "density" of lan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guage and "the specific gravity of human nature."

Language, for Hill, can effect its own laws of gravity: it "gravitates and exerts a gravitational pull." These thoughts on the weight and drag of poetic language certainly have to do with matters of prosody, but I want to focus here on another form of density in poetry. The upright, compact, vertical posture of a word or phrase may be as often semantic. Suzanne Langer writes:

> The tension which music achieves through dissonance, and the reorientation in each new resolution to harmony, find their equivalents in the suspensions and periodic decisions of propositional sense in poetry. Literal sense, not euphony, is the "harmonic structure" of poetry.

Hill found expression for an idea quite similar to this in a letter by W. B. Yeats:

> When your technic is sloppy your matter grows second-hand – there is no difficulty to force you down under the surface – difficulty is our plow.

The language achieves its weight by resisting the reader's unburdened passage through the poem. Consider those scenes where Hill balances delicately on a single landscape Péguy's real and imagined fields of battle: each line is packed hard with nuance and ambiguity, weighing upon others; each word shoulders its belongings of etymology and history; each must be removed, scrutinized, and reconceived in relation to other words and phrases around it. Speech is, Hill argues, "a matter of . . . usage perching and hatching on the surface of language." Each word and phrase makes its own *impression* on that surface. And yet this deepening, this gravitational drag of the language's semantic weight is not an uncomplicated 'pulsion' that completes itself in that action. Of Péguy, Hill declared: "Dying, your whole life/ fell into place," down "into the darkness of resurrection." So too, might not the dense impression of Hill's ponderous language represent an attempt to push free of the body of its own locution? The concept of achieved density as a method of liberation is common in his criticism. He recalls, for instance, John Crowe Ransom's remark that "the author of 'a good poem' is in its making freed from his juridical or prose self," and in a reading of Wordsworth's "The Female Vagrant," he speaks of a "collateral weight of technical concentration" and of "the drag of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

long phrasing across the formalities of the verse, as if the pain would drag itself free from the constraint." To quote again from "Poetry as Menace and Atonement":

> That commonplace image, founded upon the unfinished statues of Michelangelo, "mighty figures straining to free themselves from the imprisoning marble," has never struck me as being an ideal image for sculpture itself; it seems more to embody the nature and condition of those arts which are composed of words.

Language, in its semantic density, is forever trying to free itself from its own "quotidian shapelessness and imperfection." Might this not be something of what Hill has in mind when he speaks of 'standing by' what one writes, the language in effect keeping vigil by weighing against its own surfaces, in an effort to become "beside itself?" Although Hill is certain that, "however much a poem is shaped and finished, it remains to some extent within the 'imprisoning marble' of a quotidian shapelessness and imperfection," he still takes no "cynical view of those rare moments in which the inertia of language, which is also the coercive force of language, seems to have been overcome." If we highlight one cognate of "resurrection," "to surge" (through "surgère"), we may begin to sense how "The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy" frames both the effort of dense language to struggle free of its "prose" self and the labor of resurrection, of which Péguy's falling flat on his face among the beetroots becomes an exemplary model.

We should remember that Hill is, as ever, equally sensitive to the metaphorical status of this notion of the specific gravity of language. It is one way of describing certain achievable effects in poetry; there are certainly others. Still, Hill believes that the force of the linguistic impression in verse is substantial. Donald Davie writes that "the whole play of literal meaning, in fact, is a Swedish drill, in which nothing is being lifted, transported, or set down, though the muscles tense, knot, and relax as if it were." It is in that "tension" of thought, that we find, as Hill writes, "the unmoral nature suddenly trapped in the inexorable toils of morality." Such metaphors of language's gravity seek, however inadequately, to isolate and define this frangible yet palpable phenomenon.

Yet if Péguy's own unique manner of 'standing by' what he wrote is countenanced by Hill's mirroring homage, Hill claims no such sanction or privilege for his own vigil. What is characteristic of this reserve is his refusal to call attention to his own expiatory efforts (save where they are shown to be suspicious or inadequate), his refusal, that is, to draw explicit attention to any possible correspondence between Péguy's fall and the cadences of his own language. In this sense, the poem remains silent,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

withdrawn, sounding the "superficial" depths of its own "atonement" only in how it speaks subtly of that other. In the end, the relation of Hill's work to what he presents, through Péguy, as the "inexorable toil of morality" remains undeclared and ambiguous:

> . . . though I choose to regard that vision of "the unmoral nature suddenly trapped in the inexorable toils of morality" as an oblique yet penetrating insight into the nature of the creative act, the resemblance is imperfect, and in that imperfection lies our ambiguous hope.

Hill's "standing by" what he has written can exist only as a function of his having turned away from Péguy's more radical sacrifice. The poem finally can only "stand by" itself, as Péguy did, "on guard/ among the *Cahiers*," standing by his camp beds and wounded soldiers. But when Hill writes: "we are constrained/ to leave you sleeping," we may hear in one sense of "constrained" ('to bind together') something of the tension between Péguy's fatal act and Hill's poetic exertions that characterizes the scene of this homage, hence something of its ambiguous hope. As Theodor Adorno writes:

> Distance is not a safety-zone but a field of tension. It is manifested not in relaxing the claim of ideas to truth, but in delicacy and fragility of thinking.

Hill leaves us on this field of tension that frames a delicate balance between mutually circumscribing "descents." The cadence, the physical weight, of poetry's own vigil is constrained in its distance, shaping, and shaped by, the scene of the "charity" from which it recedes, as Hill might say, "clear calling as it fades."

HEARNE PARDEE

A Distant Vision: Charles Tomlinson and American Art

Nothing seems more old-fashioned in painting today than the observation of nature. In our culture of mass communication and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mechanical reproduction, painting itself seems a vestigial craft of some era when materials and techniques maintained a closer contact with our environment. As recent critical theory doubts the capacity of images in general to inform us of things around us, we tend to forget that our tumultuous period in art originated with the Impressionists and their close attention to the phenomenal world. It is in this perspective, though, that it makes sense to ask how the persistent interest in nature and representation, which even seems to have revived in recent years, might yet contribute to contemporary art.

American modernists of the early twentieth century believed, at least in principle, in observation of nature, even if they often imposed on their subjects a vision derived from modern art in Europe – the cubistic austerity of Sheeler or Demuth no less than the expressionist improvisation of Marin and Dove. Their practice relied heavily on the Romantic faith in contact with nature as a source of liberating originality, of new languages for new landscapes, and it reached one culmination in Jackson Pollock's submission to surrealist automatism. If there is a place for nature in today's self-conscious art, it would seem to require a more modest approach to the phenomenal world, tempered by our sober awareness of the complexity of images and less insistent on their purity and ultimate truth. British poet Charles Tomlinson, with his reaction against Romantic self-centeredness and his work in both verbal and visual forms, provides one model for such an approach, and an especially interesting one due to his long engagement with American modernism.

If there is irony in proposing Tomlinson as a model for America, given his indebtedness to Pound, Williams and other American poets, there is also some justice, since Tomlinson, for all the earnestness of this attention to nature, is fundamentally an ironist, informed by a central awareness of the distance between his medium and the reality it proposes to articulate. He writes admiringly of a poem by Marianne Moore that it "penetrates . . . while refusing to merge." His contemplative detachment cloaks a complex balance of distance and desire. The appeal of American art resided for him not only in its new directness but in its remoteness; he recounts his discovery of "that unknown quantity, American art," particularly the impression made by Georgia O'Keeffe's "The Mountain" – his first glimpse of New Mexico – in a postwar handbook of world art, "two by three inches and in monochrome." On subsequent travels in America Tomlinson established dialogues with its landscapes as well as with its poets and artists, yet without abandoning the special perspective of his European background – penetrating, but refusing to merge.

Like his poems, and his first impression of O'Keeffe, Tomlinson's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paintings leave color to the mind's eye. With characteristic precision, he refers to them as "graphics," since they are in black and white and on paper. Shaped by his ascetic temperament, they call up associations to much American art, from nineteenth-century photographs to twentieth-century environmental and conceptual works, linked by a common focus on the natural world. Although minor in relation to his poems, they offer by their conception and process an insight into his complex, contemplative stance.

By his own account, Tomlinson's first artistic influence was not American but French. "Drawn to impersonality," he was inspired by Cézanne, whose objectivity held powerful passions in check, and who endowed an art of observation with gravity and tension. "Cézanne looms gigantically over literature as well as painting, as the forerunner of a new sensitivity and a new inventiveness." In "Cézanne at Aix" Tomlinson sets forth his "ethic of perception," one "distrustful of the drama of personality of which Romantic art had made so much":

> . . . Untaught
> Unalterable, a stone bridgehead
> To that which is tangible
> Because unfelt before. There
> In its weathered weight
> Its silence silences, a presence
> Which does not present itself.

The opposite of a confessional, Tomlinson's poetry aspires to the mute tangibility of stone. The impact of William Carlos Williams, to whom "American" was not "English," derived in part from Williams's offering familiar words in a foreign guise; he objectified Tomlinson's speech. By the same token, Tomlinson borrowed from a remote source in his visual art, from the Surrealist techniques of collage and *decalcomania*. In *decalcomanía* wet paint is pressed between two sheets of paper which are then separated to expose patterns of random swirls, as impersonal as the sea or sky. Consistent throughout is Tomlinson's process of estrangement from the familiar, as he seeks "a resistance whereby the I can know itself."

In the introduction to a British exhibition which combined graphics and poems, Tomlinson discusses the evolution of his visual art in relation to his poetry. The randomness of *decalcomanía* suggests analogies to the chance connections of sounds in the texture of language; just as he might recognize caves or clouds in swirls of paint, so he might discover by similarity in sound some connection in meaning between two unrelated words. Again, one can imagine Tomlinson's interest in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Williams's novel versification. But the language of his poems – however much their development might depend on chance associations of sound – is not strictly comparable to his visual materials, which are generated by a mechanical process. Not only is language more densely and intricately structured than flowing paint, its sounds are already known through the mouth and its mechanisms of vocalization. Tomlinson, though, writes as if to disavow this proprioceptive knowledge – "It was a language of water, light and air/ I sought" ("The Marl Pits") – as if to treat words as external things. This effort at disengagement wards off the seduction of the personal voice, and it shows how deeply Tomlinson's poetry is rooted in his spectator's role.

In Tomlinson's first drawings of skulls, strongly influenced by Cubism and Cézanne, this analytical temperament emerged in a rigid style dominated by heavy black lines. *Decalcomania* released a sense of process in his work, almost to an extreme, but Tomlinson retained control by means of the complementary technique of collage. Significantly, his first use of collage came as the superimposition of a window-frame over his random swirls of paint. By moving the frame, he could focus on suggestive forms and compose. Even though the frame was that of an irregular, arabesque window designed by Gaudí, the Spanish architect admired by the Surrealists, the window device established an objective distance between the artist and his chaotic materials. Windows and houses also frame perceptions of nature in some poems, where they anchor the poet in a realm of order and testify to the particular way he inhabits his world.

Tomlinson's world is inhabited or "penetrated," to use his term with its sexual overtones, and this psychological engagement preserves his work from the dryness of prosaic description and the muteness of stone. "Penetrating while refusing to merge" can be best understood with the help of a quotation from Adrian Stokes, the British critic associated with Ezra Pound and Melanie Klein. An attentive observer can find the quotation copied in Tomlinson's hand and collaged in the corner of "Cloudhead," where dark billows suggest both clouds and human profiles. In it, Stokes speculates that when we engage our fantasy (here used in the psychoanalytic sense) in observing clouds, our interest is not to replace them with castles or horses but rather to allow such images to enhance the material forms of the clouds themselves, much like the shifting of light on their rhythmic contours. As Tomlinson emphasizes elsewhere, we seek to preserve some gap between language, visual or verbal, and the forms of reality, since this distance "gives poetry its chance to exist and to go on existing." This resistance to "too ready and emotional a fusion" enables the play of imagination to prolong itself, to intensify both the sensation of nature and our psychic participation.

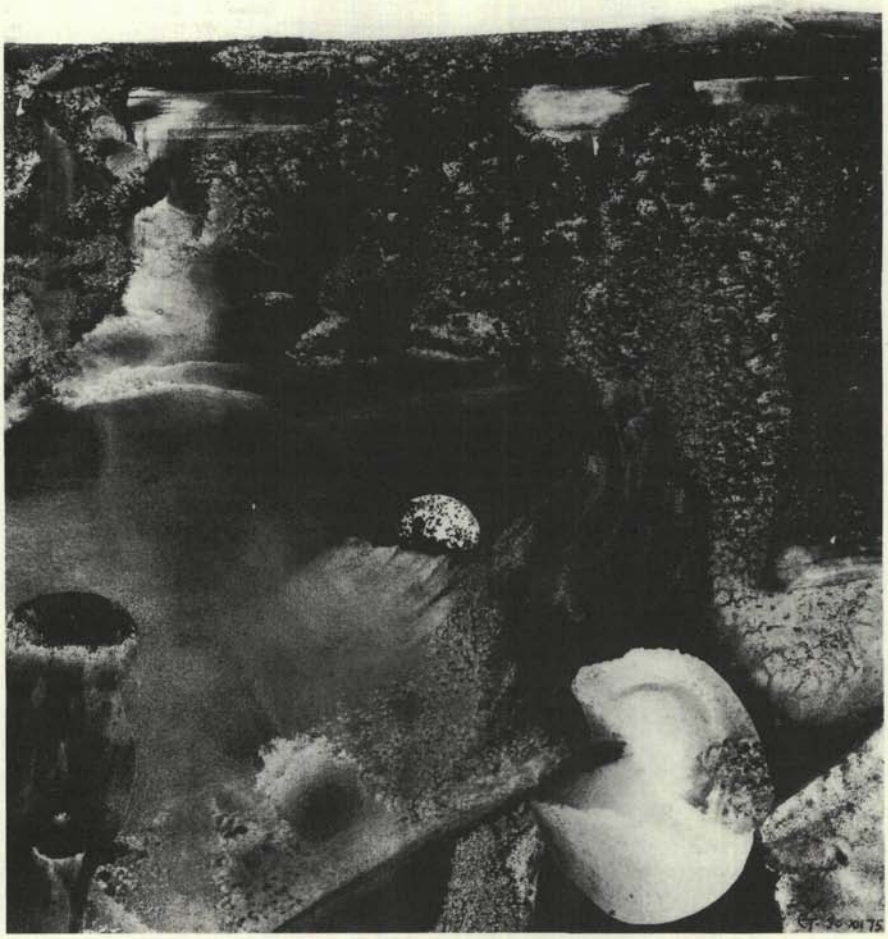
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here, then, is the sense in which distance is essential to Tomlinson's process and even serves as its stimulus. When most purely a spectator, however, studying the random patterns of *decalcomanía*, Tomlinson cannot organize, by selection and collage, on a level as specific as that in his poems; one sometimes misses in his visual works the accuracy and economy of his verse, which achieves a fuller penetration of the phenomenal world. Birds added to a cloudscape, for example, seem contrived; their anecdotal specificity constricts the fantasy Stokes defines, which demands an unfolding in time, a process rather than a static image. The graphics are most successful when suggesting the material qualities of water or stone, when elements interpenetrate, stopping just short of a literal image ("Between Sea and Shore"). Here, Tomlinson's detachment sustains a balance of analytical attention and desire. These works achieve the visual authority of photographs, but with an elusiveness that elicits closer scrutiny, and they share with the best of his poems a deeply felt animation of the physical world, that "new inventiveness" he discerned in Cézanne.

Firmly based in perception, such an art appeals to a deep impulse in the American spirit, but American poets and artists have not moved easily from their romance with nature to Tomlinson's intimate reconciliation with the physical world. Underlying Williams's enthusiasm for the material qualities of words and things is a deeper, at times almost violent, impulse for synthesis, a lust for experience he shares with Walt Whitman. In *In the American Grain* Williams portrays the American as estranged from his surroundings and traces this alienation to the Puritanical heritage of restrictions on touching. Williams articulates the concerns of artists in the circle of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, for whom it seemed necessary to learn to see America with new eyes, uninfluenced by European conventions, and to build emotional bonds to the new world and its local idioms. Linked as he is through Cubism to the starkly formal paintings of Demuth and Sheeler, Williams can also admit to a frank admiration for Matisse, who, as he wrote to Marianne Moore, "lifts me up superbly." For all his exoticism and decorative exuberance – suspect in light of the new art's rigorous objectivity – Matisse is an artist supremely at home in his surroundings, capable of the full emotional response which Williams deems the key to distilling their essence.

Tomlinson, on the other hand, seeks in painting not sensuality but muteness and objective distance; in his rejection of color and mistrust of emotional identification he has much in common with the Puritans. Tomlinson, though, begins in a situation of intimate familiarity with his surroundings and his language. His resistance to fusion establishes a tension by which he redefines the separation of outer and inner worlds, animating his subject with the freshness of renewed desire. This rational

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Between Sea and Shore (1975) by Charles Tomlinson. Gouache on paper. 19 x 17.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

balance can offer a useful perspective on the emotional ambivalence which underlies the urge for purity and objectivity in much American art. With its tendency toward extremes, American painting still finds elusive the fullness and equilibrium achieved by Matisse and Cézanne.

Tomlinson's emotional poise comes not just by temperament but from a sense of security in his surroundings and in the roles of poet and artist, roles Americans have had, to a much greater extent, to forge for themselves. Marsden Hartley, for example, a painter in the Stieglitz circle, migrated restlessly from New York to Europe. Sensitive to the links between the European art he admired and its local context, he painted directly from Cézanne's mountain in Aix. His search for roots inspired his eventual return to Maine, where he had spent an unhappy childhood, but even there he remained estranged. Although he painted local motifs, his art is inwardly motivated; for all the richness of his color, he lacks Cézanne's sense of *plein-air* luminosity and works primarily from memory. Similarly, the sexual passions which inspire his obsessive drawings of muscular sailors seem subconsciously expressed, as though to conceal them not just from his audience but from himself. Where Matisse paints frankly sexual nudes – which we accept not just for their refinement but because of the central place of the nude in Western art – the rigidity of Hartley's figures testify to the isolation and uncertainty of the artist himself, sensitive to the risks of personal exposure in a society lacking a commonly accepted artistic license.

Jackson Pollock, on the other hand, externalizes his unconscious process and resolves all the problems posed by the object in nature with a single, sustained fusion. In his efforts to unite the vast spaces of the American West to the mythic realms of the surrealist subconscious, Pollock employs a technique of automatism similar to *decalcomanía*. But where Tomlinson produces his swirls by an impersonal process akin to photography, Pollock insists on remaining "in" the painting, as though to control every drop by a sort of shamanism. Pollock eliminates the boundary between outer and inner worlds on which objectivity is founded, while Tomlinson employs the window device to restore his rational distance. Tomlinson understands that his relationship to nature entails a social commitment to shared discourse, and in that sense he can speak of an "ethic of perception."

Tomlinson is thus relevant to painting after Pollock, in its search for a new equilibrium. By temperament, his graphics belong to the reaction against abstract expressionism, to the cool art of the 1960s and seventies, with its interests in photography, documentation and environmental processes. Many painters trained under abstract expressionism sought to temper its intense subjectivity with a renewed involvement in observation, and have come thereby to share in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tomlinson's efforts to combine engagement with distance – the sort of interactions Adrian Stokes describes in his psychoanalytic criticism.

Photography, though, provides a link between Tomlinson and the American painter for whom he felt special sympathy, Georgia O'Keeffe, who all along pursued her art of detached observation. If Tomlinson's *decalcomanía* preserve, like a photographic emulsion, the traces and impressions of events, O'Keeffe's paintings testify to the importance of photography for American art, to which it offered both an immediate means of responding to a new environment and a new technology untainted by the atelier tradition. O'Keeffe and Tomlinson are both Northerners, fascinated by optical precision, yet drawn to the South, where subjectivity finds its ideal in the external forms of nature. In contrast to Pollock, O'Keeffe can evoke the expanse of the American landscape and the details of its natural forms without abandoning her meticulous technique and its photographic economy of means.

O'Keeffe might be considered the most traditional of American painters, not for her allegiance to any orthodoxy, but for her autochthony. Unlike Hartley, she prided herself on never having studied in Europe and even confessed to boredom when "the men" discussed Cézanne. Linked to the land itself, O'Keeffe embodies one version of an indigenous artistic identity. Her relationship to the New Mexico landscape recalls that taciturn acceptance of the natural order which fascinates Tomlinson in *The Hand at Callow Hill Farm* and *Oxen: Plowing at Fiesole*. But Tomlinson can also appreciate the theatrical flair of her self-created role, and the fascination of his account of their 1963 meeting arises in part from the complexity he brings to bear on her external directness and simplicity.

O'Keeffe's paintings often resolve themselves in overall patterns, as do Matisse's, but while Matisse's decorative compositions arise from the sensuous union that inspired Williams, hers retain a hardness, an insistence on the literal motif. "O'Keeffe's is a separating vision," Tomlinson observes, "giving her space to contemplate the thing in front of her." Such distanced art must maintain a sense of straightforward mystery, as Tomlinson does in his best graphics, and resist the temptation to define its elusive contents by stepping outside the process of contemplation. O'Keeffe, like Tomlinson, sometimes strays into the merely symbolic or the mundane, but in her best works she achieves a suggestive, surreal quality that seems to have arisen as a natural by-product of her concentration on her subject – something like that quality of otherness that first attracted Tomlinson to America.

Tomlinson remarks that O'Keeffe's flower paintings, in which other critics have read sexual symbols, remain "oddly literal in their strangeness and isolation" – a description that might apply to much American art.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like O'Keeffe, American artists have often cultivated the isolated role of the pioneer. If the American landscape has been frequently painted, it has not been deeply penetrated. Perhaps the recent interest in painting from nature marks a renewed aspiration for more enduring emotional bonds, similar to those of Williams or Stieglitz. Charles Tomlinson remains at a distance but invites us to share in an ongoing tradition which takes the perceptual world as its source. His own interpretations of motifs in New England and the Southwest remind us that art based on direct perception is ultimately a matter of shared experience. Recalling New Mexico, Tomlinson himself puts it in terms that echo Dante:

> For I am in England
> and the mind's embrace
> catches-up this English
> and that horizonless desert space
> into its own, and the three there
> concentrically fill a single sphere.
>
> ("A Sense of Distance")

Lush and Lean

WESTWARD. By Amy Clampitt. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.
THE CONTINUOUS LIFE. By Mark Strand. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

Amy Clampitt's fourth book of poems is very likely her best. Certainly it is her finest since her first volume, *The Kingfisher*. Called *Westward*, the new book is prefaced by an epigraph taken from Emily Dickinson: " . . . And bade it to the East/ Be faithful." That is to say, one must try to remain faithful to one's origins, to one's initial aspirations and beliefs, even as life leads one away from such beginnings toward completion, toward extinction. This faith the poet keeps, for memories of her rural childhood (Ms. Clampitt was born and raised in New Providence, Iowa) and of her original excursion – both geographical and intellectual – into the extravagant world are everywhere in these poems. It is not a faith kept easily, however, for this book is her strongest precisely because it is most consumed in ending. *Westward* is a book soaked in the awareness of mortality.

Deaths, burials, disaster and disease: the subjects of these new poems are grave, and it gives the work *gravitas*. Clampitt's work has always been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a marvel of energy and effervescence, a flight of imagination not unaccompanied by flightiness, a poetry that combines a profound intelligence and rigorous probity with an almost batty predilection for life's curiosities, for the eccentric detail. In the past, what gave her work its necessary ballast was the weight of her wide vocabulary and her naturalist knowledge. Amy Clampitt's poems are rarely academic, but they are always learned. One "takes strange gain away" from her poems. The current volume, for example, would be worth its considerable cost just for the various types of soil it names: brunizem, chernozem, culm, rhizome, stolon. As always, the reader is likely to encounter many new words in *Westward*, as well as an extraordinary number of plants. (Clampitt wishes to do for flowers and trees what Marianne Moore did for animals.) This book, though, carries the additional burden of a foreshadowed end, for the poet has employed a great deal of art in keeping the reader aware of an inevitable night that looms.

Westward is at first glance a modest title, but the lone word gains dimension as one reads through the cumulative poems. It recalls alternately the colonizing lust of Ms. Clampitt's European ancestors and the pioneer impulse of her immediate forebears. It stands as a metaphor for the decline of empire and for the dwindling of our cultural tradition. It signifies a return, if only in memory, to the places of the poet's beginning. And it implies a final, irresistible movement into old age and death. Moreover, the trajectory implicit in the book's title is embodied by the book's arrangement. *Westward* is a coherent whole in the way very few collections of poetry manage to be. The individual poems in this book are carefully placed to gain resonance by juxtaposition and to amplify the conclusions of their predecessors. The trajectory of *Westward*, from dawn to dusk, from childhood to old age, ends perforce in a return to earth, taking the poet back to New Providence, if not to any providence divine. Brunizem to brunizem, if you will. So it is that the last poem in this book is a very fine and suitably expansive piece entitled "The Prairie." It contains an immense amount of information and allusion, as well as some of the best writing this excellent poet has given us yet. Here is a passage:

> One comes to terms, in the long-drawn-out
>
> shadow-war against the old ones: comes
> to terms, if one lives long enough, with places
> that go strange, that vanish into something else:
>
> is ready to go back, at last, to gravesites, headstones,
> the fenced grassland where so many forebears' bones

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are boxed and labeled, my grandparents' among them,

my father's and my mother's ashes too. A tranquil
place, unfrightening, now that they rest there:
one comes to terms there, almost, even with dread.

Nightfall on such a landscape casts long shadows indeed, shadows which *Westward* renders beautifully.

★ ★ ★

It would be hard to imagine a first-rate poet more different from Amy Clampitt in temperament and practice than Mark Strand. Where she is chatty, he has been laconic; where her language is lush, his is often lean; where she finds endless correspondence, he tends to a withering skepticism. Nonetheless, *Westward* might have served Strand as a title, too, for his remarkable new verse is also concerned with the approach of old age and with the landscape of the American West.

Mr. Strand's first five books of poetry cultivated an aesthetic of deliberate extremity. The lines were typically short, the volumes thin, the hope afforded slim. Some ten years ago, the work ceased altogether, and although Mr. Strand's silence was cause for regret, it was difficult for a reader familiar with his work to feel much surprise. The poet had made his mark, so to speak, by sawing off the psychological limb on which he was sitting, by painting himself into a corner, by climbing into a coffin and pulling down the lid.

The casket was a cocoon. Astonishingly, Mark Strand has found a voice again, and it is a richly rewarding one. After a decade's moratorium during what might have been the prime of his career, he has now returned to print with perhaps his most impressive work to date. Against long odds, this book justifies his long absence, for Strand's poetry has been transformed. His line is more fluid now, dignified and yet unstrained. His diction is now informed by the greatest practitioners of English verse – Milton, Blake, Coleridge, Stevens, Whitman – and many of his new poems allude to these very authors, albeit obliquely and unobtrusively. In the past, Strand's work has been minimalist, surreal, quasi-theoretical. The new work is quasi-neoclassical.

It is possible that Mr. Strand's metamorphosis reflects not only the poet's personal development, but a larger development in our culture as well. Perhaps a latinate neoclassicism reminiscent of the eighteenth century is becoming what this poet terms "the dominant idiom of the period." *The Continuous Life* does in fact include a *cento Virgilianus* (a late classical form in which lines from Virgil's work are reassembled into an independent macaronic), but the prevailing spirit here is more Greek than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Latin. Strand asks the same question Socrates did: "What can we know?"

"Very pretty," said one well-known critic to me in reference to Strand's new poems, "but they're not really *about* anything." That assessment won't entirely do, though. The new poems are about the role of language and the possibility of meaning, about limits of all sorts. They are about the poet's advance into old age, about his departure from the packed frenzy of New York City to the largeness and emptiness of Utah. But "very pretty" they are. This is literally a luminous book, filled with descriptions of the spectacular light effects of our western desert. The lines are lit, sometimes with the crepuscular radiance of Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," sometimes with the fiery "darkness visible" of Milton's Pandemonium.

Finally, this is an ambitious book. Strand has "immortal longings." Though the poet contemplates the acceptance and serenity he hopes can be achieved with the passing years, he simultaneously strives to recapitulate the past and speak to the future. In a powerful poem called "Orpheus Alone," Mr. Strand gives us a parable of the poet's mission cast in terms of poetry's primary myth. Strand's Orpheus first confronts his mortality, then succeeds in reimagining his world, and at last bequeaths his conception, even as he dies, to a future that will be dependent upon him. What better applause than to close with the poet's own words, as he transmits his vision of heaven and hell, of earth, to succeeding ages:

> . . . in a language
> Untouched by pity, in lines, lavish and dark,
> Where death is reborn and sent into the world as a gift,
> So the future, with no voice of its own, nor hope
> Of ever becoming more than it will be, might mourn.

GEORGE BRADLEY

Poetic Voices

IN OTHER WORDS: NEW POEMS. By May Swenson. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.
POEMS 1963-1983. By C.K. Williams. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.95.
POEMS 6. By Alan Dugan. Ecco Press. $17.95.

In *Against Our Vanishing*, Alan Grossman speaks about a "poetry of immanence" which "reconciles all of its terms at the point of speech . . . "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and gives a "credible account of the human voice." Although May Swenson, C.K. Williams, and Alan Dugan explore vastly different emotional and stylistic ranges in their poetry, what links them are their unique and distinctive poetic voices. Each of these voices occupies its own register of speech and shows, as Grossman believes poetry must, "the continuity of a whole human world."

The familiar voice in May Swenson's *In Other Words: New Poems* speaks with a naturalist's love for the variety and particularity of the world. In poems that take great delight in discovering the shapes and associations hidden in the natural world, Swenson pays homage to Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, yet her poems are quirkier, more playful and more celebratory than her two precursors. In "Three White Vases," Swenson suggests that the act of making a metaphor precedes the act of description so that the three white egrets she sees "On a lonely, reedy patch/ of sand" are first vases, "each differently shaped." By such perceptions Swenson leads us from the surprises inherent in the world back to the world itself. In an elegy for Elizabeth Bishop, Swenson writes, "A life is little as a dropped feather. Or split shell/ tossed ashore, lost under sand. . . . But vision lives!/ Vision, potent, regenerative, lives in bodies of words." May Swenson's "bodies" are not metaphorical or symbolic but corporeal, shaped and formed in our mouths as we speak. These bodies make the vision which provides continuity to the human world. Swenson continues her elegy for Bishop, " . . . vision multiplies/ is magnified in the bodies of words./ Not vanished, your vision lives from eye to eye,/ your words from lip to lip perpetuated."

Although May Swenson often writes about nature and geographies, she is not a poet of place. Instead she is a steadfast and faithful visitor who masks her restlessness with a clear-eyed optimism and curiosity. As a result she searches with patience for " . . . the scene beyond the apron of the eye/ about to shift," as she writes in "From a Daybook." Sometimes we may feel that a poem has missed this subtle 'shift.' When this happens Swenson's poems can be too purely descriptive. But even when this occurs, as it does in "Teddy Bears" and "Shuttles," the writing is always full of exuberance as the poet looks for ways to praise and enjoy the world.

In a section of the book titled "Comics," Swenson plays with the shape of stanzas (one of her long-standing trademarks), mimics songs and advertisements, and includes a parody of a *New Yorker* poem. Her humor and wit are not limited to parody and comedy however. In the poem "Strawberrying," from the book's first section, she writes an optimist's reply to Sylvia Plath's "Blackberrying." Her poem ends with an audacious pun, " – I rise/ and stretch. I eat one more big ripe lopped/ head. Red-handed, I leave the field." This leads us delightfully back to the poem's opening line, "My hands are murder-red."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Other Words is a spacious book. It is May Swenson's seventh volume of poetry and unfortunately her last. (She died in 1989.) Appearing more than two years ago, it has received scant attention yet it is a book that deserves to be read widely, for it contains a vision of incredible integrity, a vision that "lives in bodies of words."

C.K. Williams's *Poems: 1963-1983* brings back into print his first four books of poems (*Lies*, 1969; *I Am the Bitter Name*, 1971; *With Ignorance*, 1977; and *Tar*, 1983). The volume also includes lovely versions of the late-eighteenth-century Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa. Although the Issa versions were published in 1983, Williams places them between *I Am the Bitter Name* and *With Ignorance*. As such the Issa serves as both a divider and bridge between the early and later work.

With Ignorance and *Tar* are characterized by long-lined narratives dramatized by elliptical and anecdotal meditations. The diction is colloquial, conversational; its rhythms wind through the length of a poem rather than being fenced off by line breaks and caesuras. The poems, with titles like "Spit," "Neglect," "The Dog," are inclusive and expansive, almost Whitmanesque in their eagerness to declare all experience a suitable domain for poetry. Williams writes in "With Ignorance": "Imagine a space prepared for with hunger, with dread, with power and/ the power/ over dread which is dread, and the love, with no space for itself, no/ power for itself,/ a moment, a silence, a rising, the terror for that, the space for that./ Imagine love."

In contrast to this speculative "imagining" and prose-like discursiveness, which controls and presents a poem's passion and emotion, C.K. Williams's early work – *Lies* and *I Am the Bitter Name* – is imagistic, often syntactically fragmented, and is filled with an emotional anger and violence, petulance and self-laceration. "I am going to rip myself down the middle into two pieces," he writes in "Halves," and in "Downwards," " . . . I am rolling, fragile as a bubble in the upstream spin,/ battered by carcasses, drawn down by the lips of weeds/ to the terrible womb of torn tires and children's plastic shoes/ and pennies and urine. I am no more, and what is left,/ baled softly with wire, floating/ like a dark pillow in the hold of the brown ship, is nothing."

It would be too easy to say that Williams's work changes because his own character matures, though certainly this is true. In a poem from *Tar*, he writes, "What else did I have then? Not very much: being alone most of the time,/ retrospectively noble,/ but bitter back then, brutal, abrasive, corrosive – I was wearing away/ with it like a tooth." As "Halves" and "Downwards" show, the early work does not lack substance or turbulence and is, in a raw emotive way, extremely powerful, but a reader will feel that the idiom and diction of Williams's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

early style allowed him to express passion and emotion without transforming and transcending them. As a result one feels that Williams is trapped not only within the violent prison of the self but also within an imprisoning idiom. Williams finds in the long lines of his later poems a way to escape the self, a way to examine his experience and find in it not only the rage and anger, the injustice and arbitrariness of life but also its mercy and forgiveness. Williams writes, again from "With Ignorance," "Self and other the self within other and the self still moved through its/ word,/ consuming itself, still, and consuming, still being rage, war, the fear, the/ aghast,/ but bless, bless still, even the fear, the loss, the gutting of word, the/ gutting even of hunger,/ but still to bless and bless, even the turn back, the refusal, to bless and/ to bless and to bless."

C.K. Williams comes to accept this mercy and forgiveness by making an act of faith in the power of words. This acceptance is a triumph, human and poetic, and it is this triumph that makes *Poems: 1963-1983* a remarkable and important poetic document.

Although Alan Dugan has won many of poetry's most important prizes and during the 1960's was one of America's most prominent poets, he has always been an outsider, an internal exile. No other poet of his generation has so steadfastly used his poetry as a vehicle for debunking the sentimental values of religion and the phony pieties of nationalism. In "In Memoriam: Aurelius Battaglia, And Against His Tragic Sense of Life," Dugan tells his friend, " 'Listen, Aurie, it's true that you have an appropriate fate,/ that you're an offensive loudmouth shut up by throat cancer,/ but don't really believe in appropriate fates or tragedies/ or just punishments for hubris: that's just bullshit.'" With wit, irony, and sarcasm Dugan demands that we experience life without the illusions and justifications, the superstitions, we often use to explain our predicaments. At the close of "In Memoriam," Dugan continues his counsel, "'So listen, Aurie, when you and I walk out of Ciro's drunk tonight/ . . . when you are not listening to me and I am not listening/ to you,/ we could both get hit by one of the drunk drivers/ around here/ and that would not be tragic, it wouldn't even be fate:/ it would just be ridiculous: death . . . ' "

Poems 6, like Dugan's previous seven collections of poetry, is filled with attentive and precisely described moments. Unlike Swenson's naturalist's eye or Williams's expansive and dramatic meditations, Dugan distills and reduces like an aphorist. He does so in a voice that is acerbic, almost gruff. The poem "On Fingernails in Bloody Times" asks, "Why do our torturers/ rip them off so much?/ Because they are the backups/ for our grasp of things,/ not just our caresses, and are the delicate armor/ over such sensitivity/ that we wouldn't even have the hands/ comfortably to fight with/ if we didn't have them on." The movement of this poem

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from a question to a specific image and then to a general statement is typical of Dugan's method. The image expands in a logical, almost decorous, manner, and yet this manner runs counter to the horror and pain underlying it. The intense irony of Dugan's observation gathers its power from a poetic imagination that is free of sentimentality. At times this imagination is difficult to bear, harsh and cynical. But cynicism is only an occasional risk that Dugan runs for his giving up of remorse and regret. The success of his imagination is the clear and unfettered insight of a poem like "On A Pocketknife. On Carrying," "The blade is junk except for what/ it carries on its edge: the edge,/ and what it carries on its point/ the point: that's where it narrows down/ and vanishes: its point/ is balanced on that fine frontier/ between the gross shining metal/ and nothing at all."

For more than four decades Dugan has been showing readers the "fine frontier" of mid- to late-twentieth-century America. He has brought his readers to the very edge of this frontier where its darkness shades into gray, and beyond which is a blackness and emptiness we would not have the courage to look at if it weren't for the uneasy comfort of his poetry.

MICHAEL COLLIER

Uttering the Unutterable

POEMS OF PAUL CELAN. By Paul Celan. Translated by Michael Hamburger. Persea Books. $24.95.

One of the strongest merits of Paul Celan's poetry is the way in which his work becomes more immediate and comprehensible as time goes on. Given how difficult and paradoxical so many of the poems are on the surface, this not only says a lot for Celan's talent and knowledge of what language can be and become, it also indicates what a fine job Michael Hamburger has done over the years in translating a poetry daunting in its obscurity, at times frustrating in its sealed despair, but never so oblique that we lose touch with the consciousness at work within it. In fact, it would appear that time, speech, and our own approach to language will eventually catch up to Celan, his vision and voice having been ahead of his time simply through his refusal to confront the unutterable with anything less than a new form of utterance, his own suffering and despair made palpable by the wrenched vocabulary and syntax he used to give

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life to them in words.

Born in Rumania in 1920, Celan remained throughout his life a poet obsessed with the loss of his parents to the death camps of the Holocaust. His father dead of typhus, his mother shot in the neck, Celan learned of their grisly fate while serving as a road laborer for the state in 1943. Returning to the study of medicine after the war, he eventually escaped to Vienna in 1947, moving to Paris the following year where he lived until his suicide by drowning in 1970 at the age of forty-nine. Celan's first book, published in 1952, brought him immediate fame, especially with the influential Gruppe 47, and along with Ingeborg Bachmann's, his continued to be one of the most prominent voices in postwar German letters. Because his work became increasingly obscure, some of his later volumes were not as well received, but as Hamburger's useful introduction informs us, Celan's own clinical paranoia, coupled with a bogus charge of plagiarism leveled against him, was really what led to his early end. An accomplished translator and renowned polyglot, Celan may have found it more and more difficult to lay hold of the real within the horrific, but never as a writer did he give in to silence.

The despair Celan felt over the loss of his mother in particular permeates his early poems. At times directly referred to in lines like "Oaken door, who lifted you off your hinges?/ My gentle mother cannot return" ("Aspen"), it's also clear that she is the omnipresent "you" that haunts many of the poems, such as here in "The Years From You to Me":

> Your hair waves once more when I weep. With the blue of your eyes
> you lay the table of love: a bed between summer and autumn.
> We drink what somebody brewed, neither I nor you nor a third:
>
> we lap up some empty and last thing.
> We watch ourselves in the deep sea's mirrors and faster pass food to each other:
> the night is the night, it begins with the morning,
> beside you it lays me down.

As this points out, it is the "night," or at least Celan's confrontation with it, that allows him to return to the mother by conjuring her anew. Hence, despite the sense of deep personal loss, the poem is not really confessional. Instead its source stems more from ambivalence, as well as wonder at the power of memory to reinvent and resurrect that which seems lost for good.

This is also what makes Celan a poet of the mystical. Rather than being interested in capturing the real for what it is or was, he remains

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more intrigued by the pathos inherent to his own inability to ever quite set down what was, while at the same time finding himself transformed and closer to the unutterable as a result of his failure. Ambivalence, then, becomes as much a credo as it does a final destination. In another early poem, Celan refers directly to such a need when in the first two stanzas of "Speak, You Also" he writes:

> Speak, you also,
> speak as the last.
> have your say
>
> speak –
> But keep yes and no unsplit.
> And give your say this meaning:
> give it the shade.

Functioning almost like a manifesto for Celan's later work, the poem goes on to state, "He speaks truly who speaks the shade." Celan, however, is never one given to narrow polemicism, for his concern with speaking "the shade" demands by its very nature a confluence of plurals and dualities. Thus, as if the only way out were through, the poem's last stanza finds Celan moving from the shade to the light:

> But now shrinks the place where you stand:
> Where now, stripped by shade, will you go?
> Upward. Grope your way up.
> Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer.
> Finer: a thread by which
> it wants to be lowered, the star:
> to float farther down, down below
> where it sees itself gleam: in the swell
> of wandering words.

It is precisely Celan's own ambivalence towards "wandering words" and their ability to seize hold of experience that marks his true note as a poet. Deeply influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (despite his own horror and disgust with Heidegger's Nazi sympathies), Celan found language to be both limitation and sustenance in his effort to capture despair. Because of the ability of German to combine words into new words, Celan had the opportunity to turn language upon its head. The result was that, through the deft use of Yiddish and Hebrew sources as well as the creation of new words that pointed to their own telling roots, the language he created for his poems worked to free him from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

those who had persecuted his parents and the Jews as a whole. Nothing short of a revolutionary act, the founding of a new tongue meant for Celan the creation of another life, one that could appropriate experience on its own terms, the powers inherent to such a process becoming nothing short of godly.

From 1963 onwards the difficult turns in Celan's speech also mark the spiritual urge of his poems in their effort to name what cannot be named, both in this world and whatever lies beyond. One of his most famous works, "Psalm," points towards his desire for a kind of transcendence fostered by an immersion into human suffering in order to assert the dignity of the victim, as well as the victim's ultimate right of control over his suffering through expression. Stating that "No one moulds us again out of earth and clay,/ no one conjures our dust," Celan identifies himself paradoxically with "no one" by raising a song of open protest in the last two stanzas:

> A nothing
> we were, are, shall
> remain, flowering:
> the nothing-, the
> no one's rose.
>
> With
> our pistil soul-bright,
> with our stamen heaven-ravaged,
> our corolla red
> with the crimson word which we sang
> over, O over
> the thorn.

At a moment like this Hamburger faces his toughest challenge as a translator, for even the apt "no one's rose" hardly does justice to the compression at work in "die Nichts-, die/ Niemandsrose" of the German. Nonetheless, as a "Psalm," the translation does convey the power and strangeness of the voice behind it, as well as the sadness involved in the potential for impalement upon "the thorn." Celan's identification with the "we" and the distinguishing "rose" that springs from "nothing" and "no one" is also what opens the poem up to an array of experience, a shibboleth for those who suffered, but one that refuses to limit suffering to the narrow confines of the literal.

As time went on, the inability of language to name the reality of the pain and despair at work in this century became the *idée fixe* of Celan's work. Strangely enough, what rises out of his ambivalence and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frustration with speech is both a deep sense of wonder and a growing tenderness towards those with whom he can identify. In short, Celan is not a despairing poet, but rather a poet *of* despair, his own immediate knowledge of what could be salvaged from it evident in an untitled lyric:

> To stand in the shadow
> of the scar up in the air.
>
> To stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
> Unrecognized,
> for you
> alone.
>
> With all there is room for in that,
> even without
> language.

To stand as one with those who had no one to stand by them was for Celan the only means by which he could survive. "To stand in the shadow," however, also required that he name it, as well as construct his own identity in the face of the surrounding darkness. Just how he managed to do so remains as mysterious as it does mystical, for it will be some years before the many obscure sources and references at work in his poems are sorted out by critics, scholars, and translators alike. In the meantime, we do have these poems to help guide us in both poetry and life, our own sense of wonder enlarged by a conscience that could not help but "Think of It" and demand from us the same:

> Think of it: your
> own hand
> has held
> this bit of
> habitable
> earth, suffered up
> again
> into life.
>
> Think of it:
> this came towards me,
> name-awake, hand-awake
> for ever,
> from the unburiable.

PETER FILKINS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DONALD DAVIE

Three Pastors in Berlin

Nemeth:
I was the Nazis' padre, you might say;
Magyar, you see, not Slav. Hungarians
Served with the *Wehrmacht*. Did you know that, padre?

Collins:
I don't quite see what that . . .

Nemeth:
Of course not. And quite right.
Magyars were by courtesy Aryans,
All that in the long ago, before you were born.
"His beauty to consume away like a moth,"
The psalmist says. But to the point: my claim.
It is by right of, don't you say, *the cloth*?
Pastor, I need a pastor; need him now!
And not with a German name, for various reasons.
I come to you. Confession and absolution
By a protestant rite, from some one who's not German:
That's what not I but one of my sometime flock is
Parching for; drools for it, and from me won't do.
You're chaplain to the Occupying Forces,
And English too. Your chrism he'll think sterling.

Collins:
Oh my lord – I don't mean that, but oh
Gosh! I'll be glad to oblige. It's rather
Out of my line (which is dealing with kiddies, mostly),
But I expect the drill is in the Prayer Book.
As everything is, if you look. It calls for some
Study though, and prayer. The penitent
Is not, I suppose, available just now.
Oh he is? Well, give me twenty minutes.
The church is two doors up, by the football-field.
Goodness me . . . But wait! you say he is
Protestant, I think my Free Church colleague . . .
There are sects, you know, that differ quite a lot . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nemeth:
Pastor, all he asks is to be forgiven.
In twenty minutes he'll be primed for you.

(He departs.)

Collins:
Primed for it . . . like a bomb. Oh Christopher,
Thank God you're here. This is a weird one. Listen,
It's some Hungarian comes for absolution.
I thought they were all Arcees in any case.

Thomson:
No, that's wrong. Plenty of Lutherans and
Calvinists too – I can't remember how.
It's in the histories of the Reformation.
Except you'll miss your jogging, what's the problem?

Collins:
Chris! Just think what this chap might confess to,
What I shall have to absolve him from. Oh Brother!
Pray with me.

Thomson:
What? Oh all right. But no talking.

(Silence)

Collins:
Thanks.

Thomson:
That's all right. But tell me, Dicky:
What if you hear things you can't forgive?

Collins:
There aren't such things.

Thomson:
Well no, that's true, there aren't.
Good luck, chum. Rather you than me, I tell you;
But our lot's not empowered, as you know.

(Interval)

Thomson:
Well, you look perky. How did it go, then? Oh
Seal of the confessional, I suppose?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Collins:
Yes, but I'll tell you one thing; he was not
Hungarian, he was English-speaking Russky.

Thomson:
Russky? But that's incredible. Wait a minute.
Fought with the wrong mob, did he?

Collins:
Very canny;
Something of that. But set your mind at ease:
He wasn't the butcher of Lodz or Lidice
Or if he was, he didn't tell me. Mostly
Fornications, blasphemies, run of the mill;
And something more, that I can't tell you.

Thomson:
Dicky,
I have to admire you, could have been hearing confessions
All your pastoral life.

Nemeth:
Excuse me, sirs.

Collins:
Pastor, come in. Can I present my colleague:
The Reverend Christopher Thomson?

Nemeth:
Ah, delighted!
Three pastors in one place, three hoodie-crows
(Your Scots might say) perched on one withered bough,
Or rather on one withered, two quite green.
Pastor Thomson, I am pleased to meet you.
Nemeth's the name. Yes, I am Pastor Nemeth.

Collins:
I was just brewing up a cup of tea.
Won't you join us?

Nemeth:
Why, that's very kind . . .
And as for the hoodie-crows, you must forgive me:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I spent some time in the Kingdom of Fife, you see.
While we're about it, the title "Pastor" is
Dubious in my case, I must admit,
Like most things else about me. Pastor Collins,
I am most grateful to you. As for that
Brave friend I brought, he has departed quite
Over-joyed – I'll risk that, over-joyed.

(Silence)

Thomson:
Pastor Nemeth, do you perhaps not owe us,
Me and my colleague, a word of explanation?

Nemeth:
You think so, do you? Let's see; after
My years in the Kingdom of Fife (I passed for Polish),
Back to Berlin. To men of my
Generation (I could have fathered you,
Not many of us left), Berlin's the place.
"Fought with the wrong mob. Can't go home again" –
Epitaph here, unwritten, on many a grave-stone.
For instance in your cemetery one
South African Air Force grave-slab, the inscription
In Afrikaans. You fancy that equation?

Thomson:
Not much. And Dicky and I are not so green.
You push us hard.

Collins:
I'll go and refresh the pot.

Nemeth:
He's gone to alert the guard-room, I imagine.
Very proper. Your security
Was always lax, I should have been stopped at the gate.
Your people know me, though: a small-scale nuisance.
A few hours' inconvenience is all.

Thomson:
And what about that friend of yours whom Pastor
Collins so much obliged?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nemeth:
His being here
Was out of order, obviously. However,
He's even less of a threat: a man of honour
Such as I wouldn't claim to be. And brave,
I said he was brave. I'll offer you one instance:
You've been through Checkpoint Charlie, I suppose?
Yes. Well, it's harder for us twilight people.
For him it was unconscionably risky.
He went through, and came back. And you know why?
He'd got it in his head he had a brother
Interred in the Red Army mausoleum.
You've seen it? It's impressive. Forty or
Sixty times over, I.V. Stalin lauds
The Russian dead. Not Pushkin even once?
No, not once. Nor Lenin. He came back
Appalled, distraught. Fought in the wrong mob, see?
Him and his brother, both; no help for it.
And, pastor, that's irreparable Berlin
East and West: a happy Babylon
For your young soldiers and their gravid wives.

Thomson:
In Babylon the pastoral office is
Harder than in encircled Stalingrad.

Nemeth:
Ah, very true. I seem to taunt you, pastor,
Because you have the authority I once had.
That I envy you, but not your mission;
Just as, unlike the brave old friend I came with,
I want confession, but not absolution.
Which I'm to get. A corporal's detail
Is stamping underneath us, and high time.
Pastor, goodbye. And thank you. It's not often
I get to have some clerical conversation.
"His beauty to consume away like a moth,"
You might remember; and remember me
Possibly in your prayers from time to time?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Coming soon to National Public Radio . . .

POETS IN PERSON

A New Radio Series on American Poets and Their Art

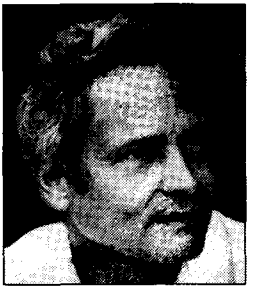


Photo: © Thomas Victor

Photo: Fred Viebahn

Hear 12 of today's most influential and engaging poets

- read and discuss the origins and meaning of their most famous and favorite works
- reveal their beginnings as writers and the turning points in their careers
- trace the changing styles in American poetry since the Fifties

John Ashbery
Gwendolyn Brooks
Rita Dove
Allen Ginsberg
Maxine Kumin
James Merrill
W.S. Merwin
Sharon Olds
Adrienne Rich
Karl Shapiro
Gary Soto
Charles Wright

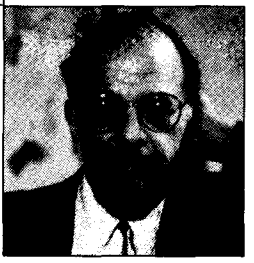


Photo: Robert Frank

Broadcasts begin **July 1991** on NPR member stations nationwide– check local listings for dates and times

Photo: Caroline Soto

Produced, written, and hosted by Joseph Parisi, Editor of *POETRY* Magazine

Photo: © Thomas Victor

For more information on *Poets in Person* contact *POETRY*
The Modern Poetry Association
60 West Walton Street
Chicago, IL 60610.
312-280-4870

POETS IN PERSON is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.
Additional suppport is made possible from NPR member stations and the NPR Arts and Performance Fund.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When War Threatens Israel

THE JERUSALEM POST
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Air Force on full alert, Patriot missiles in place

Eight terrorists slain near borders

Belgium releases terrorist in swap for four hostages

Iraqi Scud missiles strike Tel Aviv. Katyusha rockets are launched at Israel from Southern Lebanon. And THE JERUSALEM POST is the only Israeli daily English language newspaper on the spot reporting events as they unfold.

Accept three FREE copies of THE JERUSALEM POST International Edition and find out what the Middle East crisis looks like to Israelis... how the people are coping...how it affects the Palestinian situation... internal affairs...the economy.

Each week the most vital, most interesting articles are selected from THE JERUSALEM POST and published in a concise, news-packed edition. But you get much more than first-class coverage of Israeli and Middle Eastern events when you receive the International Edition of THE JERUSALEM POST...

You get incisive analyses of Israel's security and foreign affairs.

You receive regular information reports on Israel's economy—including evaluation of business and investment opportunities.

You get first-hand reports on the massive immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.

Enjoy THE JERUSALEM POST MAGAZINE—an intimate view of Israel's people and issues.

And now receive two additional magazines from Israel free of charge with your subscription to THE JERUSALEM POST.

YOUR FREE TRIAL SUBSCRIPTION

You can't lose.
CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-955-8559
or mail in the attached coupon.

You will get three weekly issues—a $7.50 single-copy value—FREE!

Then make your choice when the invoice arrives—mark it "cancel" and pay nothing—or receive an additional 26 weeks (29 weeks in all) for only $19.97. But please don't delay—this offer is for a limited time only.

TWO FREE BONUS MAGAZINES

Published nine times a year, *Israel Scene* brings you another perspective on Israel's political and economic scene and a broad view of Israel's people and their culture.

Israeli Democracy is published four times a year and features research and analysis of Israeli politics by Israel's leading academics, writers and public figures.

FREE TRIAL SUBSCRIPTION COUPON

YES.
Send me three free copies of the Jerusalem Post International Edition.

If I decide to continue, I'll receive an additional 26 weekly issues (29 in all) for just $19.97—a saving of $38.03 off the single-copy cost!

If I decide not to continue, I'll write "cancel" on the invoice when it comes, return it and owe nothing.

NAME _____ (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS _____

CITY STATE & ZIP _____

Mail to: The Jerusalem Post International Edition, P.O. Box 282, Brewster NY 10509-9981 S16BPR

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

Text and Stories

FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM. By Umberto Eco. Translated from the Italian by William Weaver. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. $22.95.
THE SHAWL. By Cynthia Ozick. Alfred A. Knopf. $12.95.

Randall Jarrell once commented that the poems of the anthologist (and poet) Oscar Williams had the air of having been written on a typewriter by a typewriter. Update the technology, and you get a fair description of the ambience of Umberto Eco's large new book, *Foucault's Pendulum*. Described on the jacket as a novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*, which is really closer to a catalogue, compendium, or anatomy than it is to any form of fiction, often seems to have been written on a computer by a computer. Oscar Williams was presumably wounded by the comparison of his sensibility to a typewriter. Eco's response, I suspect, would be a knowing wink or a weary shrug, to the effect of "Yes – so?" Even if the book's slickly mechanical surface isn't the whole point, I seem to hear Eco saying, this text's texture is at least its *point d'appui* – certainly it's nothing to reproach me with.

Indeed. If intentionality still holds – if any effect, however disheartening, is laudable so long as it's what the author was aiming for – then presumably there's nothing wrong with the almost remorselessly contrived, anticlimactic air of the whole enterprise. *Almost* but not quite remorselessly; moving moments do occur in this colossal *jeu d'esprit*, but they are simply outweighed by the not very buoyant mass of Eco's encyclopedic erudition.

Schematically cluttered and chaotically schematic, *Foucault's Pendulum* is an exhausting, exhaustive, and vastly knowing book. A magpie's nest of arcana, a beaver-dam of bricolage, a Rosetta Stone of the conspiratorial and the occult – these and many other comparisons suggest themselves in lieu of plot summary. In fact there is no need to come up with evocations, for the book teems with self-description. Few novels are so packed with phrases each of which could serve as an epigraph to the whole. Here are three among many more:

> Whenever a poet or preacher, chief or wizard spouts gibberish, the human race spends centuries deciphering the message.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma, a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth.
>
> There is no image that, combined with others, does not embody a mystery of the world.

But there's little fun to be had in unravelling work that is so unashamedly self-conscious to start with that it seems to have provided the reader with a figure at once explanatory and admonitory for connecting the dots. Merely follow through the connections, according to *Foucault's Pendulum*, and the resulting spiderweb of lines will inevitably mean something, will get you somewhere. The one heroic gesture in the novel is of the *gran rifiuto* variety: the dangerous admission that there is no meaning:

> I have understood. And the certainty that there is nothing to understand should be my peace, my triumph. But I am here, and They are looking for me, thinking I possess the revelation They sordidly desire.

The sinister They of the above passage could be construed as the fat collective spider in the web of meanings in which Eco's hapless heroes get caught. Alison Lurie has noted that deconstructionist critics often give the impression that their authors "are flies struggling in the sticky verbal strands of theoretical discourse."

Dubious or dangerous as they may be, the pleasures of knowing (and of being knowing), of laying bare preexisting but hitherto undeciphered connections, of wandering in a web of signs, are what *Foucault's Pendulum* is all about. These actions are performed by its heroes, the editors Casaubon (one recalls the scholar of that name, and his unfinished *Key to All Mythologies*, in *Middlemarch*), Diotallevi, and Belbo; they are also mimetically performed by Eco's reader. As the editors become engulfed in their project, tracing a web whose filaments extend in time and space from Templars through Rosicrucians to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, from the pyramids to the Eiffel Tower, and so on *ad nauseam*, so too the reader is drawn – ought one to write "strung"? – along.

When Eco bothers to write like a novelist, the narrative has its memorable moments, spiced with suspense or even feeling. Almost all these moments occur either very early or very late in the novel, at the point of entry into the maze or at the *cul de sac* of the labyrinth. The bulk of the book, detailing the serpentine meanderings of data, has a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

harsh, disembodiedly donnish humor but is disastrously deficient in human feeling. Eco only sporadically remembers to animate his characters at all in terms of any sentiment other than their consuming obsession with The Plan. Whether, then, we are looking for feeling between one character and another, between author and characters, or between author/characters and ourselves, most of *Foucault's Pendulum* will frustrate our naive request.

The Name of the Rose, Eco's 1983 novel, tempered its arcane excesses with memorable characters, a good suspenseful plot, and an overall thematic appropriateness of mode to matter. If Eco was liable to divagate into lengthy lectures, descriptions, and speculations, well, it seemed natural for William to instruct Adso in politics, or for Ubertino to discourse on theoogy. As well as continually educating the reader, all these voices (and there are many more in *The Name of the Rose* than I mention here) throw a varied novelistic light on their own speakers, giving characters richness and depth. *The Name of the Rose* is Tolstoyan in its many-sidedness and humanity compared to *Foucault's Pendulum*, a book even longer, more packed with words, but where human talk is severely subordinated to reading, or deciphering, what has been encoded, word-processed, erased, hidden. This is a book not about voices but about writing; it might have been written to order as an illustration of the kind of poststructuralist emphasis on the *scriptible* discussed by Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Eagleton writes:

> the 'living voice' is in fact quite as material as print . . . since spoken signs, like written ones, work only by a process of difference and division, speaking could be just as much said to be a form of writing as writing is a second-hand form of speaking.
>
> Just as Western philosophy has been 'phonocentric,' centered on the 'living voice' and deeply suspicious of script, so also it has been in a broader sense 'logocentric,' committed to a belief in some ultimate 'word,' presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience. It has yearned for the sign which will give meaning to all others – the 'transcendental signifier' – and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point . . .
>
> That any such transcendent meaning is a fiction – though perhaps a necessary fiction – is one consequence of the theory of language I have outlined.

Perhaps *Foucault's Pendulum*, whether or not it is necessary, is itself a fictional consequence of deconstructionism: a curious, rebarbative, talky specimen of the Novel of Ideas.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the absence of any transcendent sign, meaning refuses to stand still and be understood; restlessness prevails. I found I could bear to read *Foucault's Pendulum* only in short snatches, and preferably if I was in motion – pedaling away on the stationary bike at the health club, for example. People on either side of me were plugged into their Walkmans, but I, on a high cultural plateau, could read about Casaubon searching Belbo's computer files, or the secret role of the Rosicrucians in the writing of Shakespeare's plays. The passages that inspired me to dog-ear pages (pedaling all the while) never had anything to do with action; they were clever, paradoxical comments on the irresistible, frantic, doomed search for meaning.

In the midst of all this self-consciousness, an element of shoulder-shrugging, of not quite concealed indifference, came to predominate. Perhaps it was all those hours on the bike (though for the figure to be really apt the bike would have to be a treadmill) that prompted the image of a squirrel rapidly shuffling through a pile of leaves in search of a buried nut. I was the squirrel; so was any reader of *Foucault's Pendulum*; so were Casaubon and Belbo. The squirrel is well fed and glossy, if not positively overweight; its search is sheerly reflexive, instinctive on the one hand and increasingly halfhearted on the other. In the midst of its scrabbling, it slows down, pauses, and seems to forget what all the hustle and bustle was about. No real appetite impelled it anyway. No real hunger kept me reading this novel – habit, or reflex, had to take the place of appetite, and habit soon flagged. The nuggets I found were dwarfed by the enormous amout of verbal baggage the book carries around – baggage which began by being predictable and soon became something more aggressive, a series of insistent pokes from an incorrigible monologuer who knows perfectly well that his listeners long to escape. For deconstructionists, says Eagleton, literature "testifies to the impossibility of language's ever doing more than talk about its own failure, like some barroom bore." The innumerable decodings, rewritings, and revisions in *Foucault's Pendulum* come to have something of this deadly inevitability, as does the plot. If I had the courage of my postmodern impulses, if I could really give rein to discontinuity instead of merely pedalling at it, then I could read Eco's book every which way, back to front, upside down, and find designs everywhere. My expectations were too staid, and they were frustrated.

Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, on the other hand, is a work (really a single work, though strictly speaking it consists of a story and a novella) that not only can but must be read at a sitting. I read it sitting still in an armchair at home, with tears running down my face. I didn't feel irked or overburdened by learned clutter; I felt pity, grief, and gratitude. Is Aristotle suddenly hovering in the vicinity? Ozick isn't precisely writing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tragedy; for one thing, there are very funny moments in *The Shawl.* (Eco's shaggy-dog sarcasm is cut off from extremes of laughter and tears; it provokes a snicker.) What is classical is the elegant shape of this little novel, in which Ozick sets before us a world of eloquent excursions and crisp choices. Both "The Shawl" and its longer sequel, "Rosa," could be said to be located in hell, but it is a hell ordered by the writer's art. Ozick is everywhere sparing of detail – to luminous effect. As Rosa sees her child tossed at the barbed wire in the camp, the scene is rendered with meticulous cubism: urgent, inevitable, fragmented, and rapid at once.

> Far off, very far, Magda leaned across her air-fed belly, reaching out with the rods of her arms. She was high up, elevated, riding someone's shoulder. But the shoulder that carried Magda was not coming toward Rosa and the shawl, it was drifting away, the speck of Magda moving more and more into the smoky distance. Above the shoulder, a helmet glinted. The light below tapped the helmet and sparkled it into a goblet. Below the helmet a black body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves in the direction of the electrified fence.

In these two stories there is only this one death, a death not even quite seen or described. There is one shawl, first the starving baby's pacifier, then, for the surviving mother, a talisman. Eco would weave a dozen shawls into a shroud of Turin which he would then painstakingly and predictably expose as a fake. Nothing in the world of *The Shawl* is breathlessly catalogued, only to be tossed onto the scrapheap of history. The baby Magda has been tossed against the fence, but even this life and death are not lost on or for the hoarding survivor Rosa, who writes Magda, now a full-grown and beautiful ghost, long letters in Polish.

Letters are to *The Shawl* as The Plan is to *Foucault's Pendulum*; both works concern written records rather than lived lives, or texts rather than voices. Rosa's past suffering has almost destroyed her, whereas Casaubon and his friends can be said to have sought out their own suffering; but in both works a single character seems to embody the life force, urging the preoccupied philosopher out of his or her obsession with the irrecoverable past. Nubile and warmhearted Lia, Casaubon's girlfriend and the mother of his child, disappears from Eco's novel for a long stretch; Cordelia-like, she seems to signify by her eclipse that the forces of evil are triumphing. Lia's odd analogue in *The Shawl* is Simon Persky, the kind old man who befriends Rosa in the laundromat, offers her tea, advises her not to live in the past. In Ozick's bright tragedy or dark comedy, it is Persky who may prevail; the ghost of Magda shyly flees this presence of the present. In Eco's compendium, Lia and the baby would appear to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the losers: Casaubon is, or thinks he is, doomed by The Plan.

In its miniature manner, *The Shawl* is as much a museum as Eco's hypertrophied catalogue. Ozick's central icon is the shawl itself, but surrounding this fetish are various kinds of writing: letters from the inimitable James W. Tree, Ph.D., of the Department of Clinical-Social Pathology, University of Kansas-Iowa; and finally Rosa's letters to Magda. Writing to her dead daughter is a daily ceremony for Rosa; it can be no accident that some of Ozick's most beautiful and penetrating prose is devoted to the uncanny power of writing.

> What a curiosity it was to hold a pen – nothing but a small pointed stick, after all, oozing its hieroglyphic puddles: a pen that speaks, miraculously, Polish. A lock removed from the tongue. Otherwise the tongue is chained to the teeth and the palate. An immersion into the living language: all at once this cleanliness, this capacity, this power to make a history, to tell, to explain. To retrieve, to reprieve!
>
> To lie.

Eco too is eloquent on the mysterious luminosity of "the secret cipher [where] everything was the hieroglyph of something else." But because in *Foucault's Pendulum* he lacks or spurns the novelist's gift for grounding ideas in a human context, his weary *aperçus* remain disembodied and detachable as aphorisms. Ozick's tributes to the power of the word are etched by the force of her own artistry. Even so, we may pay for the distilled poetic force of *The Shawl* in the coin of human sympathy. Except for Persky, all the characters are tinged with a glow of hellfire: the "sodomists" on the night beach, the red-wigged hotel manager, "the black Cuban receptionist" who sits "maneuvering clayey sweat balls up from the naked place between her breasts with two fingers." Rosa, herself grotesque, sees grotesquerie everywhere, and nowhere more than in the ineffable epistles of James W. Tree, Ph.D., of the Department of Clinical-Social Pathology, University of Kansas-Iowa. Studying survivors, Dr. Tree hopes

> . . . that you would not object to joining our study by means of an in-depth interview to be conducted by me at, if it is not inconvenient, your home. I should like to observe survivor syndroming within the natural setting.

One wants to cheer Rosa's ritual response.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> With these university letters Rosa had a routine: she carried the scissors over to the toilet bowl and snipped little bits of paper and flushed. In the bowl going down, the paper squares whirled like wedding rice.

This particular letter, however, is singled out for special treatment; Rosa burns it, and then turns to what is in a way a corresponding ritual, writing

> the first letter of the day to her daughter, her healthy daughter . . . her daughter who was a professor of Greek philosophy at Columbia University . . .

This letter, which occasions Rosa's meditation on the power of the pen, also has a telling reference to Rosa's own mother's Polish, which was "very dense. You had to open it like a fan to get at all the meanings." *The Shawl* does in fact rather resemble a furled fan, all contained pattern, condensed suggestion, graceful potential. Eco, representing a different tradition of modernist fiction, gustily flaps his bulging catalogues. The opposing narrative strategies of these two works make their powers to move us, even to amuse us, vastly incommensurate: in sheer affective force, the light shawl outweighs the massy pendulum. There is, nevertheless, a way in which both works feel belated, nostalgic, postmodern, if one sense of postmodernism is that meaning is something that belongs to the past, something to which, in the absence of the original owner, we have only confused and disputed squatter's rights. Both Ozick and Eco show how fiercely possessive, how idolatrous we can become, clasping tatters to our chests like precious heirlooms, like maps of buried treasure, like shawls.

RACHEL HADAS

Waiting Upon History

THE REMAINS OF THE DAY. By Kazuo Ishiguro. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

It seems only appropriate, perhaps, that of all the books tumbling off the foreign presses purporting to explain Japan to the West, the most revealing one so far is not, in fact, set in Japan, has nothing to do with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Japan and, as it happens, is a novel about six unexceptional days in the cloistered life of an English butler in 1956. Yet the author, Kazuo Ishiguro, is one of those lucky individuals with one foot on either side of the widening gap between Japan and the world at large: born to a samurai family in Nagasaki, but resident in England since the age of five, he is as Japanese as his name, and as English as the flawless prose he writes. Janus-minded, he is perfectly positioned to see how one island of shopkeepers, bound by a rigid sense of class and an unbending sense of nationalism, can shed light on another; how one monarchy, bent on keeping up appearances, in part by polishing nuances, is not so different from another; and, in fact, how the staff of an English country house, with its stiff-backed sense of "self-training," its precisely stratified hierarchy, its uniforms and rites and stress on self-negation, might almost belong to Sony or Toshiba. No man may be a hero to his valet, but every valet is a samurai hero to his man.

The Remains of the Day is, as its title suggests, written in that favorite Japanese form, the elegy for vanished rites; it is a vespers novel, set in an England made more lovely and more lulling by the late-afternoon light in which it is seen, dark shadows lengthening across the empty rolling lawns. And, to all appearances, the novel, which recently won the Booker Prize, the highest literary award in Britain, is nothing more, really, than a portrait of a gentleman, reflected in the elaborately formal diary of a butler as he takes himself on a motoring holiday through the English countryside, doing nothing more dramatic than looking in on a former colleague, peering, in some perplexity, at the ways of the ordinary world and wondering what "dignity" in a butler truly means. *The Remains of the Day* may seem just a small, private English novel done to – Japanese – perfection; a vale from a valet. To anyone familiar with Japan, however, the author's real intention slips out as surely as a business card from a Savile Row suit.

For Ishiguro's butler is so English that he could be Japanese, in his finely calibrated sense of rank, his attention to minutiae, his perfectionism and his eagerness to please; his pride is his subservience, and his home is only in the past. Stevens has no self outside his job, and no thought for anything except his job; he even – like a good company man – gives "military-style pep-talks" to his staff, and surrenders now and then to "wishful thinking of a professional kind." His is the gentleness of innocence as well as self-delusion.

In smaller ways too, he reminds one of a *sarariman*: solemnly practicing witticisms in the hope of putting his new employer at ease, and deriving his great – his only – emotional excitement from excruciatingly impersonal daily chats over cocoa in the parlor with the housekeeper. Sometimes, when he addresses his dying parent as "Father" (and never

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"you"), or when the woman who is closest to him delivers sentences like, "Is that so, Mr. Stevens?", his narrative might almost be translated from the Japanese; and sometimes, when he reveals, in all naiveté, the discriminating assumptions on which his life is based – "But life being what it is, how can ordinary people truly be expected to have strong opinions on all manner of things?" – one can almost hear the unconscious snobbery of Sei Shonagon, or a hundred other ancient Kyoto courtiers.

Yet part of the skill of Ishiguro's plot is that, by placing us inside the butler's voice, and mind, he makes his most distant qualities accessible to us and almost touching. He lights up the Japanese mind from within, and then shows how it is all about us: the rococco periphrases, euphemisms and litotes, the life so provincial it could be almost prelapsarian, the unfailing self-surrender that seems so alien, so Japanese to us – all are alive, and not so long ago, in the quiet hills of Oxfordshire. When Stevens reminds a colleague, "Our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer," it sounds perfectly natural, even normal, in the context of their lives; and when he reminds himself, "There was little to be gained in growing despondent," his stoicism makes all the practical sense in the world. Seen from afar, he might seem cold or prudish; seen from within, he is a profoundly decent man trying to do his best. In perhaps the novel's central scene, the bespoke butler dutifully goes about his job, tending to the feet of a distinguished guest, while his own father dies of a stroke upstairs. In most lights, this kind of self-denial would strike us as unnatural to the point of heartlessness. But in the context of Steven's high-minded code of service, it becomes the crowning achievement of his career – grace under intensest pressure – and one can almost see how he can recollect the night of his father's death "with a large sense of triumph." Here is the heroism of Benkei at the Bridge, here the self-transcendance of Shinji Hasegawa at the Seoul Olympics, robbed of a gold medal after four years of practice, yet refusing to indulge himself in protest.

Stevens's life, as he sees it, has no meaning save in self-subordination. He is only as great as the man he serves, and he can best serve king and country, he believes, by waiting, quite literally, upon history, keeping the silver polished on behalf of the ministers and ambassadors who visit his house to change the world. "A 'great' butler can be only, surely, one who can point to his years of service and say that he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman – and through the latter, to serving humanity," he opines (not so different from "I work for Mitsubishi, therefore I am"). And, as befits a classic retainer, Stevens does indeed shine in the reflected glory of his lord: on those infrequent occasions when he ventures outside the manor gates, he is taken by nearly everyone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he meets, with his perfect manners, his well-cut suit and his posh address, as a gentleman himself. Yet it is one of the sad ironies of his sheltered life that he never fails to be disarmed, even intimidated, by the very people who look up to him; Stevens is never more moving – or more Japanese – than when he earnestly meditates on the virtues of "bantering" and realizes, to his sorrow, that he will never be able to speak the language of the world.

For while Ishiguro can create an utterly convincing Japanese from the inside out, he is also far enough away from Japan to be able to count the cost in fashioning so limited a self; and to see that meticulously sticking to decorum is a way of staying at a safe distance from warmth or wit or risk. Not for Stevens the bold inspirations of Jeeves – he is a man who lives entirely by the book, permitting himself neither opinions, nor curiosity, nor even, really, self. And in the end, it is his very virtues – his loyalty, diplomacy and his self-restraint – that leave him high and dry. His unquestioning fidelity to his master's voice leads him to defend a man who fraternizes with Nazis and dismisses two housemaids on the grounds of being Jewish. And his insistence on self-control at any cost, and in any context, prevents him from admitting, even to himself, any softer feelings to sustain him – such as love, perhaps, or hope. For all his command of subtleties, Stevens is, in some ways, emotionally deaf, trying with reason to fathom the logic of the heart. "Why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?" the woman who loves him finally cries out; to that, he can answer only that it is his duty, his self. The dying light that casts a valedictory glow on all the fading houses of his world finally includes the protagonist himself.

The great skill of Ishiguro's book – the grace of his position, perhaps – is that he lets us sympathize with both the lover's impatient cry, and the butler's perfectly dignified response. In that sense, he shows us how unreasonable it is for us to expect those trained – or even hired – to be self-annulling, to act otherwise; and how unreasonable, for them, to expect us to renounce impulse or emotion. In the process, he begins to explain how the Japanese can be highly sophisticated, yet innocent as toddlers; refined, yet seemingly by reflex; extraordinarily considerate and in spite – indeed *because* – of that, apparently unfeeling. Translating the most Japanese of virtues into terms we recognize as our own, he brings their foreign features home to us.

Without a doubt, the thirty-five year-old author owes a great deal to his background. The atmosphere of all his books is set by the title of the first, *A Pale View of Hills*, and all three of his novels have that same ink-wash elusiveness, an ellipticism almost violent in its reticence; all three, moreover, are exquisitely fashioned miniatures, miracles of workmanship and tact that suggest everything through absence and retreat. His

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

books are all as delicate as antique vases, and sometimes just as cold. Occasionally, in fact, his craft can almost seem too well-designed, too careful in its calculations; it seems almost too symbolic that Stevens's English country house be taken over by a crude, straightahead American, and too allusive that a couple mentioned in passing, just before an Indian anecdote, be called "Mr. and Mrs. Muggeridge" (as if to summon up Malcolm Muggeridge, who famously – and appropriately – claimed that Indians were the last great Englishmen). Yet all this can be forgiven so long as Ishiguro shuttles with such discretion between his motherland and his mother tongue, making close to us the quiet heroism that is the other, unacknowledged side of Japanese "inflexibility." There is a nobility to Stevens's uprightness, and a pathos too, only compounded, perhaps, by his awareness that all the world will interpret it as folly. In the end, *The Remains of the Day* is a perfectly English novel that could have been written only by a Japanese.

PICO IYER

The Changing Culture of the University

Spring 1991
VOLUME LVIII NUMBER 2

$5.00 per copy
$1.50 postage and handling
available from:

Partisan Review
236 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215
617/353-4260

"The Changing Culture of the University," a Conference (November 2-4, 1990), was made possible by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Fund, Inc.

A Special Issue of
Partisan Review

with contributions from:

LIONEL ABEL
ROBERT ALTER
JAMES ATLAS
BRIGITTE BERGER
CLEANTH BROOKS
ROBERT BRUSTEIN
MORRIS DICKSTEIN
DENIS DONOGHUE
JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN
NATHAN GLAZER
MARY GORDON
GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB
HILTON KRAMER
EDITH KURZWEIL
JULIUS LESTER
STEVEN MARCUS
CZESLAW MILOSZ
WILSON J. MOSES
CYNTHIA OZICK
WILLIAM PHILLIPS
ROGER SHATTUCK
CATHARINE STIMPSON

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TheTel Aviv Review Volume 3

Gabriel Moked, Editor / An international annual literary anthology

"Rarely has a new literary journal entered the marketplace with such grace and force as the *Tel Aviv Review*"—*Judaica Book News*

Bringing together a diversity of fiction and nonfiction writing on topics concerning Judaism, Israel, the Middle East, and related issues, The *Tel Aviv Review* 3 contains original contributions from Israeli, Russian, American and European writers.

Fiction Yehoshua Bar-Yosef, James Vladimir Gill, Gabriel Josipovici, David Markish, Amos Oz, Henry H. Roth, Yaakov Shabtai, S. Yizhar, Timur Zulfikarov

Essays Robert B. Alter, Richard Burns, John Felstiner, Arthur Hertzberg, Edmond Jabès, Hanna Krall, Andrew A. Macintosh, Shimon Markish, Gabriel Moked, Anthony Rudolf

Interviews Michel Couturier interviews Francis Bacon, David Hockney, and Henry Moore; George Steiner, Timur Zulfikarov

Poetry Yehuda Amichai, Gennady Aygi, Angela Ball, Efim Bershin, Thorkild Bjørnvig, David Curzon, Oskar Davičo, Sigalit Davidovitch, Natalya Gorbanevskaya, Haim Gouri, Mikhail Grobman, Michel Haddad, Michael Hamburger, Olav Hauge, Michael Heller, Miroslav Holub, David Ignatow, Shirley Kaufman, Gunter Kunert, Rainer Kunze, Aleksandr Kushner, Seymour Mayne, Yunna Morits, Stanley Moss, Yevgeny Rein, Anthony Rudolf, Harvey Shapiro, Joseph Sharon, Boris Slutsky, Michael Stein, Yevgeny Vinokurov, Yona Vollach, Andrei Voznesensky, Eddy M. Zemach

---

Also available The *Tel Aviv Review* Volumes 1 and 2

Annual subscription price: $14 individuals, $28 institutions. Please add $2 for subscriptions outside the U.S.

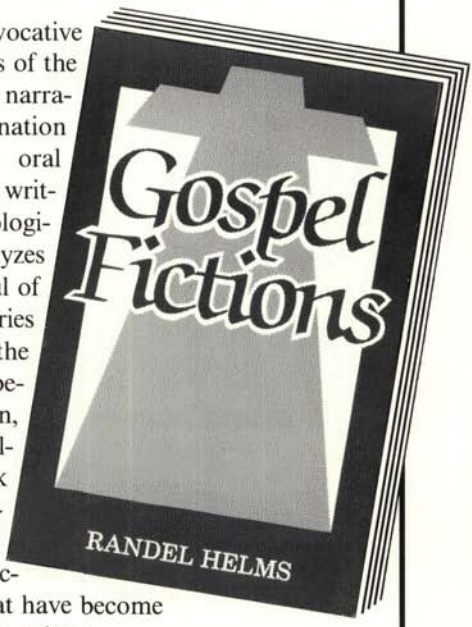
Single copy price: $19.95

Duke University Press Journals Division
6697 College Station Durham, NC 27708

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOSPEL FICTIONS

by Randel Helms



According to this provocative book, the four Gospels of the New Testament are fictional narratives, composed as the culmination of an extensive literary and oral tradition—dramatic, idealistic writings produced to serve a theological vision. Randel Helms analyzes the most familiar and powerful of the Gospel narratives: the stories of Christ's birth, his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, his betrayal by Judas, his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Scholarly yet accessible, this book reveals the Gospels as influential works of literary art—creative interpretations of doctrine and literary precedent that have become the supreme fictions of Western culture.

Randel Helms, a noted biblical and literary scholar, is professor of English at Arizona State University.

"This book represents scholarship well communicated."

—Joe E. Barnhart, *University of North Texas*

154 pages • Cloth $24.95 • Paper $14.95

At better bookstores, or order directly from

Prometheus Books

Call toll free (800) 421-0351 (24 hours)

59 John Glenn Drive Amherst, NY 14228–2197

Add $3.00 p&h; NY State residents add sales tax. #40077

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the Old Marketplace

A Memoir of Laughter, Survival, and Coming of Age in Eastern Europe

Joseph Buloff

Translated by Joseph Singer

From the Old Marketplace, now ably translated by Joseph Singer, is cast as fiction—both the story of a boyhood and of a city, Vilnius, in the 12 years between the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and the Russian Revolution... Buloff creates a Chagallesque vision of Vilnius by blending hyperbole, sarcasm, and sweetness...What is most charming about this tale is the way it blends the coming of age and the coming of history."

—Richard Lourie, *New York Times Book Review*

$19.95 cloth

A History of the Arab Peoples

Albert Hourani

"Now in what is undoubtedly a masterly summation, the whole story of the Arab peoples is laid out before us by Hourani. There are no other books like it...It is difficult to overestimate the signal importance of this book for this time. Here at last is a genuinely readable, genuinely responsive history of the Arabs... He completely controls the best in modern as well as traditional Western scholarship and often lets the Arabs, their poets, historians, sages and ordinary people speak along with, rather than against, that learning."

—Edward Said, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

The Belknap Press

$24.95 cloth

40 halftones, 576 pp.

The Alchemy of Race and Rights

Patricia J. Williams

In this autobiographical essay, Patricia Williams, a professor of commercial law, a lawyer, and a descendent of a slave and the white lawyer who owned her, reflects on the intersection of race, gender, and class. Using the tools of critical literary and legal theory, she inscribes her views of contemporary culture and current events by tracing the workings of such phenomena as the Howard Beach incident, the law-school classroom, Oprah Winfrey and the workings of "ordinary racism"—everyday occurences, casual, unintended, but mortifying.

$24.95 cloth

Harvard University Press

79 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-2480

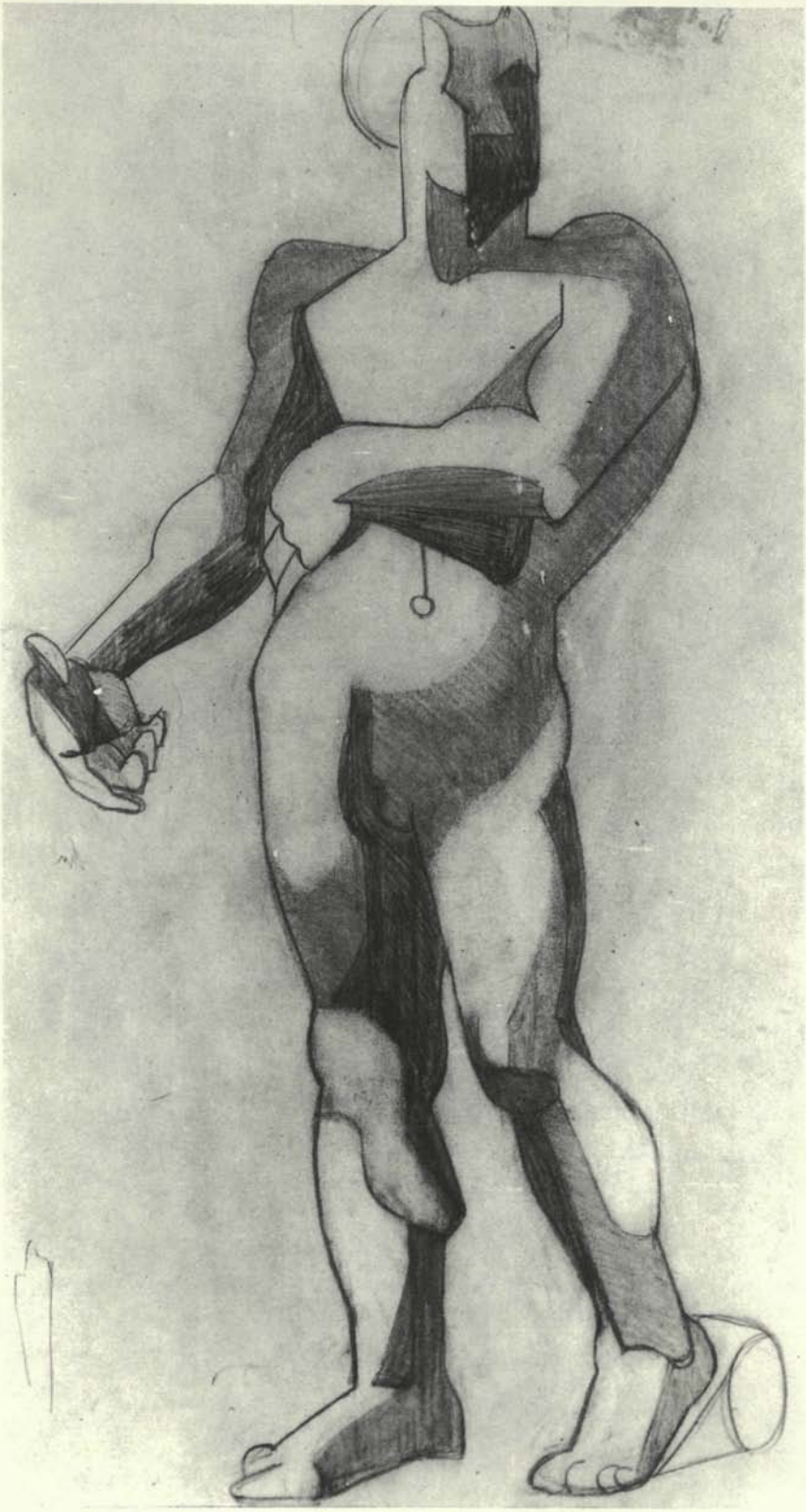
Partisan Review

Published at Boston University

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Untitled (1943) by Hans Hofmann. India ink on paper. 11 x 8 and 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Twining Gallery. Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Untitled (1952) by Dorothy Dehner. Ink and watercolor on paper. 19 and 1/4 x 12 inches. Courtesy of Twining Gallery. Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Flat Track Series (1961) by Stanley Boxer. Oil stick, gouache, graphite, and pastel on board. 17 x 22 and 1/4 inches. Courtesy of Dorsky Gallery.

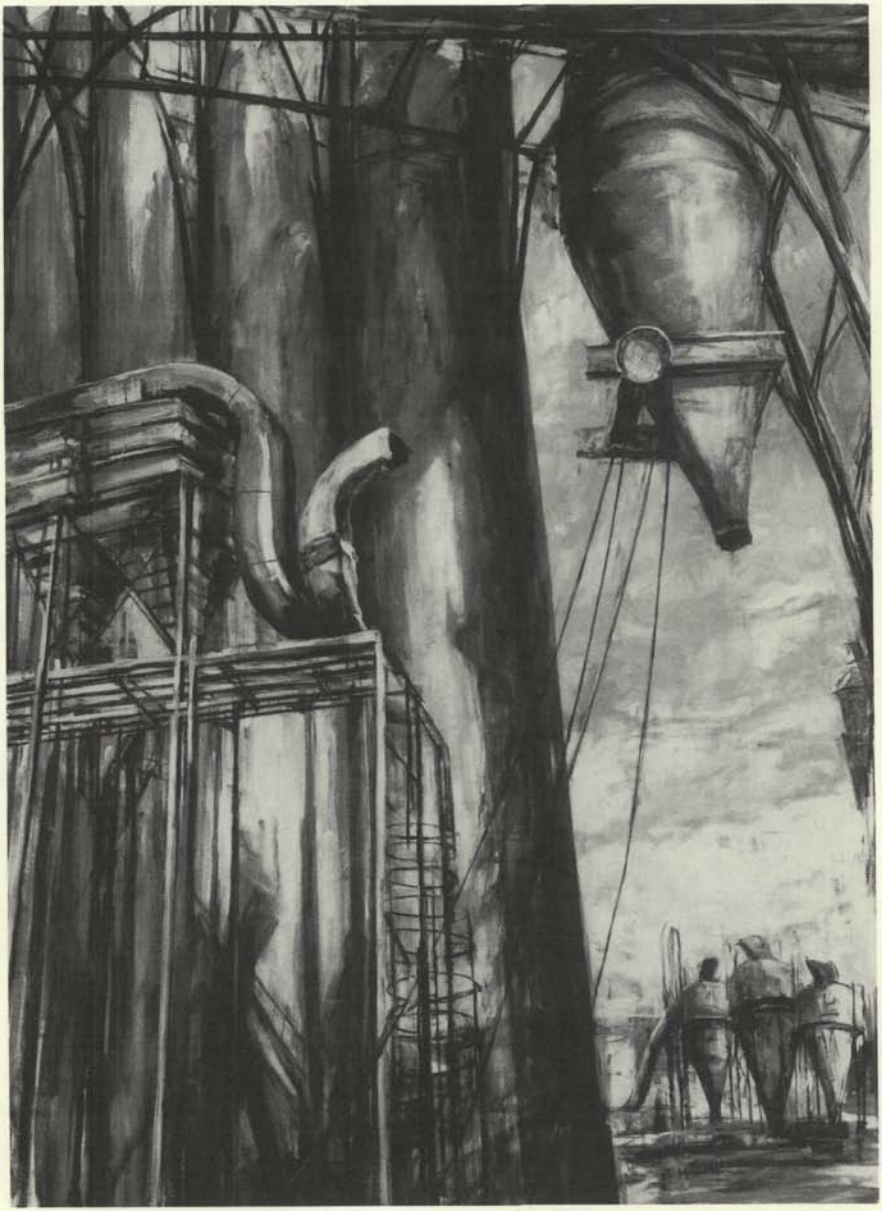
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Summertime in Italy (Paper Painting) (1960) by Robert Motherwell. Oil and pencil on watercolor paper. 57 and 1/4 x 42 and 3/4 inches. Courtesy of Knoedler & Company. Photo credit: Ken Cohen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Black Bird Has Spoken (1990) by John Griefen. Acrylic on canvas. 63 x 58 and 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Opera (1990) by Medrie MacPhee. Oil on canvas. 63 x 90 inches. Courtesy of Philippe Daverio Gallery Ltd.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED